







# *Eminent Women. Series*

EDITED BY JOHN H. INGRAM.

MADAME. DE STAËL.



# MADAME DE STAËL.

BY

B E L L A D U F F Y.

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## PREFACE.

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UNPUBLISHED correspondence—that delight of the eager biographer—is not to be had in the case of Madame de Staél, for, as is well known, the De Broglie family either destroyed or successfully hid all the papers which might have revealed any facts not already in possession of the world.

The writer of the present brief memoir has, consequently, had to fall back upon the following well-known works :

The *Correspondance* of the Abbé Galiani, of Mme. Du Deffand, of Rachel Varnhagen, and of Schiller; the *Memoirs* of MarmonTEL, of Mme. D'Arblay, of Mme. de Rémusat, of Mme. d'Abrantès, of Bourrienne, and of the Comte de Montlosier; Ticknor's *Letters*; Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre Tombe*; De Goncourt's *Histoire de la Société Française pendant la Révolution*, and *Histoire de la Société Française pendant le Directoire*; Lacretelle's *Dix Années d'Épreuve*; Michelet's *Le Directoire*, *Le Dix-huit Brumaire*, and *Jusqu'à Waterloo*; *Le Salon de Madame Necker*, by Vicomte d'Haussonville; *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, by Vernon Lee; Byron's *Letters*;

Benjamin Constant's *Letters to Mme. Récamier*; Coppet and Weimar; *Les Correspondants de Joubert*, by Paul Raynal; *Les Causeries du Lundi*, and other studies by Stc. Beuve; Droz' *Histoire du Règne de Louis XVI.*; Villemain's *Cours de Littérature Française*; the fragments from Constant's *Journals*, recently published in the *Revue Internationale*; Sismondi's *Journal* and *Letters*; and sundry old articles in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; besides various other volumes, of which the list would be long and wearisome to detail..

BELLA DUFFY.

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# MADAME DE STAËL.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE MOTHER.

“ My dear friend having the same tastes as myself, would certainly wish always for my chair, and, like his little daughter, would beat me to make me give it up to him. To keep peace between our hearts, I send a chair for him also. The two are of suitable height and their lightness renders them easy to carry. They are made of the most simple material, and were bought at the sale of Philemon and Baucis.”

Thus wrote Madame Geoffrin to Madame Necker when the intimacy between them had reached such a pitch as to warrant the introduction into the Necker salons of the only sort of chair in which the little old lady cared to sit.

The “dear friend” was M. Necker, and the “little daughter” of the house must then have been about four or five years old, for it was in the very year of her birth (1766) that Madame Geoffrin took her celebrated journeys to Poland, and it was some little time

after her return that she became intimate with Germaine Necker's parents.

They were still in the Rue de Cléry. M<sup>r</sup>. Necker's elevation to the Contrôle Général was in the future and had probably not been foreseen ; it is possible that even the *Éloge de Colbert*, which betrayed his desire for power, had not yet appeared ; nevertheless, he was already a great man. His controversy with the Abbé Morellet, on the subject of the East India Company, had brought him very much into notice ; and, although his arguments in favour of that monopoly had not saved it from extinction, they had caused his name to be in everybody's mouth.

His position as Minister for the Republic of Geneva gave him the entry to the Court of Versailles, and brought him into contact with illustrious personages, who otherwise might have disdained a mere wealthy foreigner, neither a noble nor a Catholic. His well-filled purse completed his popularity, for it was not seldom at the service of abject place-hunters and needy literati. Moreover, he had been fortunate in his choice of a wife.

By the time that the King of Poland's *bonne maman* wrote that little note to Madame Necker, the wife of the Genevese banker had founded a salon as brilliant and crowded as Madame Geoffrin's own. She had achieved this in a few years, whereas Madame Geoffrin for the same task, and in spite of her wealth and generosity, had required a quarter of a century.

But Madame Necker, besides being young, rich, and handsome, was bitten with the prevailing craze for literature, could listen unwearingly for hours to the most laboured *portraits* and *éloges*, and, although herself the purest and most austere of women, would open

her salon to any reprobate, provided only he were witty.

Madame Necker, first known to us as Suzanne Curchod, was the daughter of a Swiss pastor, and saw the light in the presbytery of Crassier in the Pays de Vaud. The simple white house, with its green shutters, is still to be seen, separated from the road by a little garden planted with fruit-trees. The Curchods were an ancient and respectable family whom Madame Necker (it was one of her weaknesses) would fain have proved entitled to patents of nobility. Some Curchods or Curchodis are found mentioned in old chronicles as fighting beneath the banners of Savoy, and it was from these that Madame Necker sought vainly to trace her descent. She held a secret consultation, for this cherished object, with the Sieur Chérin, genealogist to the King; but his decision disappointed her. Chagrined, but not convinced—for her opinions were not easily shaken—she carried home the precious papers and locked them up without erasing the endorsement, *Titres de noblesse de la famille Curchod*, which she had written with her own hand.

M. Curchod took pains to give his only daughter an unusually thorough and liberal education. She knew Latin and a little Greek, “swept with extreme flounce the circle of the sciences,” and was accomplished enough in every way to attract the admiration, very often even the love, of sundry grave and learned personages.

Mixed with her severe charm there must have been some coquetry, for at a very early age she began making conquests among the young ministers who arrived on Sundays at Crassier, ostensibly to assist M. Curchod in his duties; and a voluminous corre-

spondence, somewhat high-flown, as was the fashion of the day, is extant to prove that Suzanne possessed the art of keeping her numerous admirers simultaneously well in hand. Verses, occasionally slightly Voltairian in tone, were also addressed to her; and later in life Madame Necker reproached herself for her placid acceptance of the homage thus expressed, and owned that had she understood it better she would have liked it less.

Suzanne's parents, proud, no doubt, of their daughter's talents and accomplishments, took her after a while to Lausanne. That pleasant city, since giving up its own political ideals and falling under the sway of Berne, had lapsed into easy-going, intellectual ways, and even professed a discreet and modified form of Voltairianism. Ever since the author of the "Henriade" had dazzled it with his presence, it had been on the look-out for illustrious personalities, and welcomed all foreigners who showed any promise of literary distinction.

What with her pretensions to be a *bel-esprit*, her youth and beauty, Mademoiselle Curchod captivated the town at once, and very soon had the proud joy of founding an *Académie de la Poudrière*, and being elected to preside over it under the fantastic name of Thémire. The members of this intellectual society were of both sexes and all young. Their duties consisted in writing *portraits* of one another, and essays or odes on subjects in general. Combined with these profound pursuits, there seems to have been a good deal of flirtation, and doubtless both the scholasticism and the sentiment were equally to Suzanne Curchod's taste.

During her stay in Lausanne, she fascinated Gibbon,

and, for the first time in her career of conquest, fell in love herself. So profound was her passion—or so profound, in her self-tormenting way, did she imagine it to be—that she remained constant to her engagement during the four years of Gibbon's absence in England; and wrote him agitated, abject letters of reproach when he, alleging his father's invincible objections, broke off the engagement. Her devoted friend Moulton, who appears to have loved her all his life, was so touched by her despair, that, with Suzanne's own consent, he sought the mediation of Rousseau, in order to bring the recreant lover back to his allegiance. But the attempt was vain. Gibbon showed himself as heartless as Mademoiselle Curchod had proved indulgent, and when the lady, as a last resource, proposed that they should at least remain friends, he declined the amiable offer as being “dangerous for both.” Nevertheless, when they met again in Paris some years later, Mademoiselle Curchod, then married, welcomed Gibbon with kindness, and even wrote him notes containing, here and there, allusions to the past. For the age was eminently sentimental, and to cherish memories of vanished joys, and make passing, pathetic reference to them, was a luxury of which Madame Necker would have been the last to deprive herself.

On the death of her parents, Suzanne found herself obliged to seek for a situation as governess or companion. All her life fortunate in making and keeping the most devoted friends, she found plenty anxious to help her in carrying out her plans. Among her sincerest admirers was the charming Duchess d'Enville, whose sweetness, grace, and naïf enthusiasm for Switzerland (as a kind of romantic Republic, all shepherds and shepherdesses, toy-châlets, natural

sentiments, and *stage liberty*) were so characteristic of the age, and so admiringly celebrated in Bonstetten's letters. It was, in all probability, through her introduction at Geneva that Suzanne became acquainted with Madame de Vermenoux, a rich Parisian widow, who fell immediately under the young orphan's charm, and, engaging her as a companion, took her back to Paris. In that intellectual centre—the promised land of all her thoughts—Suzanne speedily came into contact with several interesting people, among others the delightful Bonstetten, then still young in years, destined to be always young in heart, and whom, in the course of this work, we shall often see among the band of fervent admirers surrounding Madame de Staël.

Another frequent visitor at Madame de Vermenoux's house was M. Necker, at that time a partner in Thellusson's bank, and already possessed of ample means. He was a rejected suitor of the hostess, but continued on very good terms with her, and perhaps was expected to propose a second time. If such were the widow's ideas, they were doomed to disappointment; for very soon after Necker's introduction to Suzanne he made a transfer of his affections to her. He left, however, for Geneva, without declaring his sentiments; and Mademoiselle Curchod, once again in love, and once again in despair, poured out her feelings in a long letter to Moulton. That ever faithful friend did his best to bring things to a happy termination, by taking care that M. Necker, during his sojourn in Geneva, should hear nothing but praise of Suzanne. The device, if needed, was most successful; for the banker returned to Paris with his mind made up. He proposed without loss of time,

and it is, perhaps, not too much to say that Mademoiselle Curchod jumped into his arms.

All the friends of the bride elect were delighted, and even Madame de Vermenoux proclaimed her pleasure at the turn which affairs had taken. Some little subsequent coolness, however, she must have manifested; for the date fixed for the wedding was kept a secret from her. When the day dawned, Suzanne stole out quietly and met M. Necker at the church-door.

In what form the news was broken to the widow is not known; but any annoyance she may have felt was not of long duration, for in after years we find Madame de Vermenoux a frequent guest of the Neckers, and the little daughter, born on the 22nd April 1766, was named Germaine after her.

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## CHAPTER II.

## GERMAINE.

WHEN Germaine was about six years old, M. Necker retired from the bank, and devoted himself to the study of administrative questions. This was in preparation for the career to which he felt himself called. For years past his wealth had come frequently to the aid of a spendthrift Government and an exhausted exchequer ; and it was natural that he should seek his reward in power. In his *Éloge de Colbert* published in 1773, he was at no pains to conceal that he was thinking of himself when drawing the portrait of an ideal Minister of Finance ; and some annoyance at Turgot's appointment is thought to have added force to his attacks on the latter's theories concerning free trade in corn.

Madame Necker, profiting by her husband's growing importance, quickly attained the summit of her ambition in becoming the presiding génie of a salon thronged with intellectual celebrities. Buffon and Thomas were her most trusted 'friends, but, ~~austere~~ though she was, she did not disdain to admit to a certain intimacy men like Marmontel, the Abbé

Galiani, St. Lambert, and Diderot. They all flattered her outrageously to her face, while some of them, Marmonet especially, sneered at her behind her back. All made love to her, and, misled by the studied warmth of pompous eloquence, with which she proclaimed her delight in their society, they not rarely persuaded themselves that they had added her to the list of their conquests, and were chagrined and not a little disgusted later to discover that the only man she cared for was her husband. Indeed, she bored everybody with praise of M. Neckér, composing and reading aloud in her own salon a preposterous *portrait* of him, in which she compared him to most things in heaven and earth and the waters under the earth, from an angel to a polypus. Her rigidity, her self-consciousness, her want of charm, and absence of humour, were a fruitful theme of ridicule to the witty and heartless parasites who crowded her drawing-rooms and made raids on her husband's purse. And yet such was the native force of goodness in her that, sooner or later, in every instance, detraction turned to praise. The bitter Madame de Genlis, who detested the Neckers, and ridiculed them unsparingly, admits that the wife was a model of virtue; and Diderot paid her the greatest compliment which she, perhaps, ever received, when declaring that had he known her sooner, much that he had written would never have seen the light.

Grimm was another frequenter of the Necker salons; and the mistress of the house being no less prodigal of gracious encouragement towards him than towards everybody else, he also eventually declared his sentiments of friendship and admiration, with as much warmth as his manners allowed of. Like Voltaire,

he called her “Hypatie”; and testified the genuineness of his regard by scolding her about her religious opinions. Needless to say these were not infidel, but they were, in Grimm’s opinion, disastrously illogical; and, his fine taste in such matters being offended, he expressed his displeasure on one occasion in no measured terms. Madame Necker retorted, for she loved a discussion too fervently ever to be meek; but apparently Grimm was too much for her. Either his arguments were irrefragable, or his manner was irritating; the result was that Madame Necker—to the “polite consternation of her numerous guests—dissolved into tears.

Humiliated, on reflection, at having made such a scene, with characteristic ardour she seized the opportunity to write Grimm a high-flown apology; and an interchange of letters followed in which the philosopher compared the lady to Venus completed by Minerva, and Madame Necker ransacked the universe for metaphors wherewith to express her admiration of the gentleman’s sensibility.

As the Neckers spent their summer at St. Ouen—not the historic Château associated with Louis XVIII., but another in the neighbourhood, and of the same name—the proximity to Paris enabled them to continue unbroken their series of dinners, suppers, and receptions twice a week.

Many of the guests were notable personages, and most of them types which vanished for ever a few years later—engulphed by the storm-wave of the Revolution. There was the Abbé Morellet, clear-headed, gravely ironical, with as much tact in concealing as in displaying the range of his knowledge and the depth of his insight; St. Lambert, a little

cold, but full of exquisite politeness, supremely elegant in expression, and, without being lively himself, possessed of the delicate art of never quenching liveliness in others ; D'Alembert, charming, if frigid, and destined soon to be an object of sentimental interest, because of his inconsolable grief for Mlle. L'Espinasse ; the Abbé Raynal, doubtless enchanted to pour into Madame Necker's respectful ears the floods of eloquence for which Frederick the Great laughed at him ; these, with Marmontel and Thomas, were almost always present.

A few years earlier the Abbé Galiani, delightful and incorrigible, would also have been seen. This extraordinary little man, political economist, archæologist, mineralogist, diplomatist, and pulcinello, was one of Madame Necker's professed adorers. Everybody liked and admired him ; Diderot described him as "a treasure on a rainy day" ; Marmontel as "the prettiest little harlequin," with "the head of Machiavelli" ; while, for Madame Geoffrin, he was her *petite chose*. After so much praise, and from such people, Madame Necker must certainly have accepted him unconditionally ; but it would be interesting to know exactly with what air she listened to his impassioned declarations. When eventually restored to his native land—or, as he expressed it, exiled from Paris—he wrote her impudent and characteristic epistles, in which reproaches at her virtue, intimate interrogations regarding her health, and envy of M. Necker's happiness, mingled with inquiries after everybody in the beloved capital, and wails of inconsolable grief at his own departure. "*Quel désert que cinquante mille Napolitains !*" he exclaims.

Madame Du Deffand was also for a time an inti-

mate guest at the Neckers'. The friendship did not last long. The marquise, by this time infinitely weary of men and things, appears soon to have tired of Madame Necker's declamations and M. Necker's superiority. Her final judgment on the wife was very severe, rather ill-tempered, and therefore unjust. Madame Necker was, she says, "stiff and frigid, full of self-consciousness, but an upright woman." Her liking for the husband held out longer, but finally succumbed to the discovery that, while very intelligent, he failed to elicit wit from others. "One felt oneself more stupid in his company than when with other people or alone."

There is no trace of any variation in the friendship between Madame Necker and Madame Geoffrin. Perhaps the latter, with her habitual, gentle "*Voilà, qui est bien,*" called her young friend to order, and early repressed the emphatic praises which could not but have wearied her.

We are told that she hated exaggeration in everything; and how could Madame Necker's heavy flattery have found favour in her eyes? Her delicate *savoir-vivre*, too, that preternaturally subtle sense which supplied the place in her of brilliancy and learning and early education, must have been vexed at Madame Necker's innocent but everlasting pedantry. We can fancy, however, that she managed, in her imperceptible, noiseless way, to elude all these disturbing manifestations; and then she was doubtless pleased at Madame Necker's good-humoured patience with her scoldings. All Madame Geoffrin's friends, as we know, had to submit to be scolded; but probably few showed under the infliction the magnanimity of Madame Necker, who must have possessed all the power of

submission peculiar to self-questioning souls. The calm old lady, ensconced in her own peculiar chair, whether in Paris or at St. Ouen, in the midst of the sparkling society to which she had perseveringly fought her way, was disturbed in her serenity by no presage of misfortune.

In point of reputation the most illustrious, and in point of romantic ardour the most fervent, of all Madame Necker's friends, was Buffon. He wrote her some eighty letters full of fervid flattery and genuine, almost passionate affection, to which she responded in the terms of adulation that the old man still held dear. Such incense had once been offered to him in nauseating abundance; now that he was old and lonely it had diminished, and this fact, joined to his unquestionable admiration for Madame Necker, made him all the more easily intoxicated by her praise. Mixed with her high esteem for his genius was a womanly compassion for his bodily sufferings that rendered the tie uniting their two minds a very sweet and charming one. On hearing that his end was near, she hastened to Montbard, where he was residing, and established herself by his bedside, remaining there five days, and courageously soothing the paroxysms of pain that tortured her own sensitive nature to see.

Perhaps her strong and unconcealed desire that the philosopher should make a Christian end, lent her fortitude to continue the self-imposed task. There is no proof that she directly influenced him in that final declaration of faith by which he scandalised a free-thinking community; but she had often discussed religious questions with him, and deplored his want of a definite creed; consequently, it is possible that her

mere presence may have had some effect upon him at the last.

On the brink of the irrevocable, even the pride of controversy may come to be a little thing; and Buffon's wearied spirit perhaps recoiled from further speculation on the eternal problem of futurity. And to be at one, in that supreme moment, with the pitying woman who had come to solace his final agony, may have weighed with him above the praise and blame over which the grave was to triumph for ever.

Madame Necker delighted in making herself miserable, and the melancholia natural to him probably caused Thomas to be the most thoroughly congenial to her of all her friends. The author of the *Pétréide* and the foe of the Encyclopædists, he enjoyed during his life a celebrity which posterity has not confirmed. He was the originator of the unhappy style of writing in which Madame Necker so delighted that she modelled her own upon it. For the rest, he was a man of extremely austere and simple life, as well as of very honest character. Passion was unknown to him, unless, indeed, the profound and sentimental esteem which he felt for Madame Necker was of a nature under more favourable treatment to have developed into love. If so, she found the way in his case, as in all, to restrain his feelings within platothic bounds, and indulged him chiefly with affecting promises not to forget him when she should be translated to heaven.

Madame Necker may be said to have touched the zenith of social distinction the day on which the Maréchale de Luxembourg entered her salon. This charming old lady and exquisite *grande dame*, the

arbiter of politeness and fine manners, was felicitously and untranslatable, described by Madame du Deffand, in one delightful phrase, as "*Chatte Rose!*" Upon all those who met her at this period (when she was already nearly seventy), she seems to have produced the same impression of softness and elegance, of fine malice and caressing irresistible ways.

Madame de Souza—that sweet little woman round whose name the perfume of her own roses still seems to cling—drew a portrait of the Maréchale in her novel *Eugénie de Rothelin*, under the name of the Maréchale d'Estouteville; nor did she, as Ste. Beuve tells us, forget to introduce, by way of contrast, in the person of Madame de Ricny, the pretty and winning Duchess de Lauzun, grand-niece of the Maréchale, and another flower of Madame Necker's salon.

This little Duchess, "*joli petit oiseau à l'air effarouché*" (to quote Madame du Deffand once again), was so devoted an admirer of M. Necker, that, hearing somebody in the Tuileries Gardens blame him, she slapped the speaker's face. Apart from this one outburst, which saves her from seeming too meek, she flits shadowy, sweet and pathetic, across the pages of her contemporaries. The record of her life, as we know it, is brief and touching. She kept herself unspotted from a most depraved world; loved a very unworthy husband and died, during the Terror, on the scaffold.

Another friend, and apparently a very sincere one, of Madame Necker, was Madame d'Houdetôt. Madame Necker seems to have accepted that interesting woman just as she was, including her relations with St. Lambert, whom the letters exchanged between the two ladies mention quite naturally. The affection which

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she felt for the mother was extended by Madame D'Houdetôt to the little daughter, and there are letters of hers extant describing visits which she had paid to Germaine, while Madame Necker was at Spa or Mont Doré for her health.

They were written to relieve the natural pain of absence on the parents' part, and are full of praises of the child, of her engaging ways, her air of health, and her magnificent eyes.

## CHAPTER III.

### GIRLHOOD AND MARRIAGE.

IN the brilliant world in which she awoke, Germaine very soon found her place. It is a very familiar little picture that which we have of her, seated on a low stool beside her mother at the receptions, and fixing on one speaker after another her great, astonished eyes.

Soon, very soon, she began to join in the conversation herself, and by the time she was ten or eleven years old she had grown into a person whose opinion was quite seriously consulted. Some of the friends of the house, Marmontel, Raynal, and others, enchanted to have a new shrine in the same temple at which to worship, talked to her, wrote verses to her, and laid at her young feet some of the homage up to then exclusively devoted to Madame Necker.

That lady began by being enchanted at Germaine's amazing powers, and set to work to educate her with characteristic thoroughness and pedantry. Everything that was strongest in her, family pride, the sense of maternal authority, the love of personal influence, the passion for training, seemed to find their opportunity in the surprising daughter whom Heaven had

given her. She drove the child to study with unrelenting ardour, teaching her things beyond her age, and encouraging her at the same time further to exercise her intelligence by listening to conversations on all sorts of subjects. The consequence was that at eleven Germaine's conversational powers were already stupendous. On being introduced to a child of her own age, a little Mademoiselle Hüber, who was her cousin, she amazed her new acquaintance by the questions she put to her. She asked what were her favourite lessons ; if she knew any foreign languages : if she often went to the theatre. The little cousin confessing to having profited but rarely by such an amusement, Germaine was horror-stricken, but promised that henceforward the deficiency should be remedied, adding that on their return from the theatre they should both proceed to write down the subject of the pieces performed, with suitable reflections ; that being, she said, her own habit. In the evening of this first day's acquaintance, Mademoiselle Hüber, already sufficiently awe-struck, one must think, was further a witness to the attention paid to Germaine by her mother's most distinguished guests.

"Everybody addressed her with a compliment or a pleasantry. She answered everything with ease and grace. . . . The cleverest men were those who took most pleasure in making her talk. They asked what she was reading, recommended new books to her and . . . talked to her of what she knew, or of what she had yet to learn."

From her tenderest years Germaine wrote *portraits* and *éloges*. At fifteen she made extracts from the *Esprit de Lois*, with annotations, and about the same time the Abbé Raynal was very anxious that she should

contribute to his great work an article on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

But before this, when she was only twelve, the effects of such premature training had made themselves visible. Her feelings had been as unnaturally developed as her mind. Already that rich abundant nature, so impetuous, generous, and fervid, which was at once the highest gift and deepest curse, had begun to reveal itself in an exaggerated sensibility. Praise of her parents moved her to tears; for the little cousin she had an affection amounting to passion; and the mere sight of celebrated people gave her palpitation of the heart. She did not care to be amused. What pleased her best was what pained her most, and her imagination was fed upon the "Clarissa Harlowe" school of novels.

By degrees her health began to fail, and at fourteen the collapse was so complete as to cause the most serious alarm. Tronchin was consulted, and prescribed absolute rest from study. This was a cruel blow to Madame Necker. A nature allowed to develop spontaneously, a mind virgin of the pruning-hook, were objects of as much horror to her as if they had been forbidden by Heaven. That her daughter, just at the final moment, when what was doubtless the mere preliminary course of study had been traversed, should be released from bondage and abandoned to her own impetuosity, was well-nigh insupportable. She had no alternative but to resign herself, and therefore, silently and coldly as was her wont, she accepted the situation. Nevertheless, she was neither reconciled to it, nor felt the same interest in Germaine, again. Years afterwards, the bitterness that she had hoarded in her soul betrayed itself in one little phrase.

Madame Necker de Sausanne was congratulating her on her daughter's astonishing powers. "She is nothing," said Madame Necker, coldly, "nothing to that which I would have made her."

Despatched from Paris to the pure air of St. Ouen, and ordered to do nothing but enjoy herself, the young girl quickly recovered her vivacity, and developed a charming joyousness. This new mood of hers, while gradually estranging her from her mother, drew her closer to her father. M. Necker, who detested literary women, had looked with but scanty favour on his daughter's passion for writing, and it is probable that, as long as she was exclusively under Madame Necker's rule, he did not feel for her more than the commonplace sort of affection which a busy and serious-minded father bestows on a little girl.

During her childhood Germaine herself lavished all her warmest affection on her mother, being apparently drawn to her by the subtle attraction which a very deep and reserved nature exercises on an excitable one. Madame Necker, pale, subdued in manner, restrained in gesture, surrounded with respectful adorers, revered by her husband, and flattered by her friends, seems to have filled her observant, imaginative little daughter with a feeling bordering on awe. Very sensitive, yet very submissive, and quite incapable of resentment, Germaine threw herself with characteristic passionate ardour into the task of winning her mother's praise. How complacently Madame Necker must have accepted the homage implied in these efforts, it is easy to imagine. A little contempt for the child's impetuosity helped to give her the firmness necessary for moulding, according to her own notions, the nature so plastic, yet so vital, thus placed within

her grasp. A good, nay, a noble woman, yet essentially a self-righteous one, she could comprehend perfection in nothing that did not, to a certain degree, resemble herself. Her ideas, her principles, her will, were, she conceived, to shape and fashion, restrain and recreate, this thing of fire and intellect, this creature all spirit, instinct, and insight, that she named her child. Germaine predestined all her life to struggle, to consume herself to ashes—like the Arabian princess who fought with the *djinn*—succumbed for the time to her mother's will, by the annihilation of everything that was inalienably *herself*. The spell lasted as long as the tyranny which had created it; but once freed from the thraldom, wandering with her young cousin through the avenues of St. Ouen, drinking in the freshness of the shadowy glades, and acting innocent little dramas, Germaine became more natural and, in her mother's eyes, more commonplace. Madame Necker lost interest in her, drew frigidly away from her, and even began to feel some jealousy of the new-born affection between the father and child.

When Germaine was fifteen, M. Necker fell from power. A few months previously he had published his *Compte Rendu*, and roused the enthusiasm of France. He had been the idol of the hour, and his name was in everybody's mouth. From all sides, from nobles and bourgeois alike, letters of praise and congratulation poured in upon him. Among these was an anonymous epistle, written by Germaine, and immediately recognised by her father, who knew the author's style.

She was transported with joy and triumph, and probably understood her father's achievements better than two-thirds of the people who applauded them. For she was endowed with a marvellous quickness and com-

pleness of comprehension, and, where she loved, her sympathy was flawless. She was always willing to welcome and adopt the thought of another, and never seemed to guess how much of force and brilliancy it owed to the illuminating power of her own vivid intellect.

On M. Necker's retirement from the Ministry of Finance, he came to St. Ouen, followed in his retreat by the pity and praise of the best and brightest minds of France. His daughter, seeing more of him than ever, now, in the greater leisure which he enjoyed; and regarding him as the heroic victim of an infamous political cabal, soon conceived for him an affection that amounted to idolatry. On his side he was enchanted with her humorous gaiety, and lent himself to her playfulness in the not rare moments when Germaine's small sum of years got the better of her large amount of intelligence.

One day Madame Necker had been called from the dining-room, during meal time, on some domestic or other business. Returning unexpectedly, she heard a good deal of noise, and, opening the door, stood transfixed with amazement on seeing her husband and daughter capering about, with their table-napkins twisted round their heads like turbans. Both culprits looked rather ashamed of themselves when detected, and their spirits fell to zero beneath the lady's frozen glance.

The Neckers, in spite of the ex-minister's so-called "disgrace," continued surrounded with friends, so that from fifteen to twenty, at which latter age she married, Germaine's days were one long intellectual triumph.

Her *portraits* read aloud to the guests, were

eagerly received and enthusiastically applauded. She wrote one of her father, in competition with her mother; but when Monsieur Necker was appealed to on the respective merits of the two compositions, he wisely declined to pronounce any opinion. His daughter, however, divined his thoughts : "He admires Mamma's portrait," she said, "but mine flatters him more."

Her own merits inspired the wits surrounding her in their turn. A *portrait* by Guibert described her as a priestess of Apollo, with dark eyes illumined by genius, black floating curls, and marked features expressive of a destiny superior to that of most women. This was an ornamental way of saying that Germaine was not beautiful. She was, in fact, very plain, strangely so, considering that she had magnificent eyes, fine shoulders and arms, and abundant hair. What spoilt her was the total want of grace. When talking, she was much too prodigal of grimace and gesture, and, if eloquent and convincing, was also overpowering.

She felt too much on every subject, and carried other people's small stream of platitudes along in the rushing tide of her own emotions, till her hearers were left exhausted and admiring, but also a little resentful. She disconcerted the very persons whom she most revered, by only pausing long enough in her talk to grasp their meaning, and feed her own thought with it till that glowed more consumingly than ever, while all the time what *she* felt, what *they* felt, and what *she* imagined that *they* meant to say was proclaimed in loud, harsh accents, most trying to sensitive nerves.

All this time she was busily writing, and her father,

who nicknamed her Mademoiselle de Ste. Ecritoire, could not correct the tendency, even by his unceasing gentle raillery. In a comedy entitled *Sophie, ou les Sentiments Secrets*, she scandalised Madame Necker, by selecting for a subject the struggles of a young orphan against the passion inspired in her by her guardian, a married man. To this period belong also *Jane Grey* and *Montmorency*, both tragedies, and various novelettes.

When Germaine was nearing twenty, the weighty question of her 'marriage came under discussion; and serious consideration was then, for the first time, accorded to a suitor whom her large fortune had long attracted.

This was the Baron de Staël Holstein, Secretary to the Swedish Embassy. He seems to have been one of the elegant and amiable diplomatists whom the Courts of Europe in those days turned out by the score. He had wit and good manners, as he had also the golden key of the Court Chamberlain; otherwise, his personality was insignificant in the extreme.

He was fortunate, however, in serving under a very popular ambassador, the Count de Creutz; and in representing a king who, both for political and personal reasons, was anxious to keep on good terms with France. Gustavus III. of Sweden adored Paris, and was in continual correspondence with Madame de la Mark, Madame d'Egmont, Madame de Boufflers, and anybody who would keep him conversant with the gossip of the Tuileries and Versailles. The Count de Creutz having the intention of shortly retiring, it was understood that the Baron de Staël-Holstein was to be his successor. That gentleman, who comprehended his own interests, and was head-over-ears in debt,

lost no opportunity of persuading the Swedish King's trio of witty correspondents, who in their turn were careful to impress on Gustavus, as well as on Louis XVI. and his Queen, that the next Swedish ambassador must be endowed with a splendid fortune.

A grand marriage was, of course, to be the means of achieving this; and Mademoiselle Germaine Necker, an heiress and a Protestant, was fixed upon for the bride.

The delicate negotiations lasted for some considerable time, during which period the prize the Baron sought was disputed by two formidable rivals—William Pitt and Prince George Augustus of Mecklenburg, brother of the reigning Duke. Madame Necker warmly supported Pitt's suit, and showed great displeasure at being unable to overcome her daughter's obstinate aversion to it. Seeing how distinguished the Englishman already was, and how brilliant his future career promised to be, one wonders a little at Germaine's rejection of him. Probably the secret of her determination lay in the passionate adoration which she had now begun to feel for her father, on whom—as all his friends and partizans assured her—the eyes of misery-stricken France were fixed, as on a saviour.

The idea of quitting France in such a crisis, at the dawn, so to speak, of her father's apotheosis, would naturally be intensely repugnant to her; and possibly for that very reason Madame Necker, always a little jealous of the sympathy between her husband and her daughter, warmly advocated Pitt's claims. A painful coldness ensued between mother and daughter, and lasted until the former happened to fall dangerously ill. Then Germaine's feelings underwent a revulsion of passionate tenderness; and in the touching recon-

ciliation which ensued between parent and child, Mr. Pitt and his suit were forgotten.

Prince George Augustus of Mecklenburg was even less fortunate, being refused by both Monsieur and Madame Necker, with a promptitude which he fully deserved. For he had nothing to recommend him but his conspicuous position, and had very impudently avowed that he sought Mademoiselle Necker's hand only for the sake of her enormous dower.

The ground being thus cleared for Madame de Bouffler's protégé, that energetic lady set to work to obtain from Gustavus a promise not to remove the Baron, now ambassador, from France for a specified long term of years.

This assurance that they would not be parted from their daughter having been given to the Neckers, and formally embodied in a clause of the marriage settlement, the document was signed by the King and Queen of France, and several other illustrious personages, and the wedding celebrated on the 14th January 1776.

The first few days after her marriage, Madame de Staël, according to the custom of the time, passed under her father's roof; and among her letters is a sweet and affectionate one, which she addressed to her mother on the last day of her sojourn with her parents.

"Perhaps I have not always acted rightly towards you, Mamma," she writes. "At this moment, as in that of death, all my deeds are present to my mind, and I fear that I may not leave in you the regret that I desire. But deign to believe that the phantoms of imagination have often fascinated my eyes, and often come between you and me so as to render me unre-

cognizable. But the very depth of my tenderness makes me feel at this moment that it has always been the same. It is part of my life, and I am entirely shaken and unhinged in this hour of separation from you. Tonight . . . I shall not have in my house the angel that guaranteed it from thunder and fire. I shall not have her who would protect me if I were dying, and would enfold me, before God; with the rays of her sublime soul. I shall not have at every moment news of your health. I foresee regrets at every instant. . . . I pray that I may be worthy of you. Happiness may come later, at intervals or never. The end of life terminates everything, and you are so sure that there is another life as to leave no doubt in my heart. . . . Accept, Mamma, my dear Mamma, my profound respect and boundless tenderness."

Perhaps when Madame Necker read this letter, she felt in part consoled for the real or fancied pain which her brilliant and unaccountable daughter had given her.

And in spite of passing dissensions with her mother, Germaine's twenty years of girlhood had been essentially happy, for they had been tenderly and watchfully sheltered from blight or harm..

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## CHAPTER IV.

## NECKER'S SHORT-LIVED TRIUMPH.

SOME spiteful ridicule awaited the young ambassadress on her first entrance into official life, and, strangely enough, among these detractors was Madame de Boufflers herself, who wrote to Gustavus III.: "She has been virtuously brought up, but has no knowledge of the world or its usages. . . . and has a degree of assurance that I never saw equalled at her age, or in any position. If she were less spoilt by the incense offered up to her, I should have tried to give her a little advice." Another courtier's soul was vexed because Madame de Staël, when presented on her marriage, tore her flounce, and thus spoilt her third curtsey. As much scandal was caused by this *gaucherie* as if it had been some newly-invented sin; but the delinquent herself, when the heinousness of her conduct was communicated to her, simply laughed. She could, indeed, afford to despise all such censure, for, if too obstreperously intellectual and ardent for artificial circles; she soon attained to immense influence among all the thinking and quasi-thinking minds of France.

Politics were now beginning to be the one absorbing subject whose paramount importance dwarfed every other; and Madame de Staël, always in the vanguard of ideas, threw herself with characteristic enthusiasm into the questions of the day. To talk about the glorious future of humanity was the fashionable cant of the hour, but Madame de Staël really believed in the regeneration about which others affectedly maundered; and at all social gatherings in the Rue Bergere, or at St. Ouen (where her presence was as frequent as of yore), she held forth on this subject to the crowd of dazzled listeners, whom she partially convinced and wholly overpowered.

She had been married but little more than a year when the first shadow of coming events dimmed the lustre of her new existence. In a speech pronounced at the Assembly of Notables in April 1787, M. de Calonne impugned the accuracy of the famous *Compte Rendu*. M. Necker indignantly demanded from the King the permission to hold a public debate on the subject, in the presence of the Assembly before which he had been accused. Louis XVI. refused; and M. Necker then immediately published a memoir of self-justification. The result was a *lettre de cachet* which exiled him to within forty leagues of Paris. The order, conveyed by Le Noir, the Minister of Police, reached M. Necker in the evening, when he was sitting in his wife's salon, surrounded by his daughter and some friends. The liveliness of Madame de Staël's indignation may be imagined. She has described it herself in her *Considérations sur la Révolution Française*, and declared that the King's decision appeared to her an unexampled act of despotism. Its parallel would not have been far to seek,

and acts a thousand times worse disgrace every page of the annals of France. But Madame de Staël, always incapable of judging where the "pure and noble" interests of her father were concerned, can be pardoned for her exaggeration in this instance, as she had half France to share it. "All Paris," she says, "came to visit M. Necker in the twenty-four hours that preceded his departure. Even the Archbishop of Toulouse, already practically designated for M. de Calonne's successor, was not afraid to make his bow."

Offers of shelter poured in upon M. Necker, and the best châteaux in France were placed at his disposal. He finally elected the Château de Marolles, near Fontainebleau, although not, as he naïvely confesses in a letter to his daughter, without some secret misgivings as to "the decided taste in all things good and bad of dear mamma."

Thither Madame de Staël hastened to join him, and to console by her unfailing sympathy, her constant applause, and inexhaustible admiration, a misfortune which, after all, had been singularly mitigated. M. Necker accepted all this homage as his due, and his magnanimous wish, that the Archbishop of Toulouse might serve the State and King better than he would have done, is recorded by his daughter with the unction of a true devotee. There is something adorably simple and genuine in all her utterances about this time. In a letter to her husband (who apparently never objected to play second fiddle to M. and Madame Necker) she directs him exactly how to behave at Court, so as to bring home with dignity, yet force, to their Majesties the wickedness of their conduct towards so great and good a man; and she

adds that but for her position as Ambassador she would never again set foot within the precincts of Versailles. This she wrote even after the *lettre de cachet* was cancelled. A few months later a reparation was offered to her father with which even his own sense of his worth and the idolatry of his family should have been satisfied; for he was recalled to power—unwillingly recalled, it is true. The King's hand was forced. His present sentiments to M. Necker, if not hostile, were cold: while those of the Queen had changed to aversion. But the Marquis de Mirabeau had defined the position of France as “a game of blind-man's buff which must lead to a general upset”; consternation had invaded even the densest intelligencies; and the voice of the public clamoured for its saviour. This time, again, the title given to M. Necker was Director-General of Finance; but, on the other hand, the coveted entry into the Royal Council was accorded him. It was the first instance, since the days of Sully, of such an honour being granted to a Protestant; it was given at a moment when the suggestion to restore civil rights to those of alien faith had been bitterly resented by the French clergy; and it was one of the many signs (for those who had eyes to see) that the last hour of the old régime had struck.

The nomination was hailed with a burst of applause from one end of France to the other. Madame de Staël hurried to St. Ouen with the news, but she found her father the reverse of elated. Fifteen months previously—the fifteen months wasted by the ineptitude of Brienne—he said he might have done something; now it was too late.

Madame de Staël was far from sharing these feel-

ings. When anything had to be accomplished by her father, she was of the opinion of Calonne, in his celebrated answer to Marie Antoinette—" *Si c'est possible, c'est fait ; si c'est impossible, cela se fera.*" And undoubtedly M. Necker did his best on returning to power ; but, in spite of his honesty, good faith, and unquestionable abilities, he was not the man for the hour.

Very likely, as his friends, and especially his daughter, asserted, no Minister, however gifted, could have succeeded entirely in such a crisis ; and doubtless he was as far as any merely pure-minded man could be from deserving the storm of execration with which the Court party eventually overwhelmed him. We have said that he did his best : his mistake was that he did his best for everybody. In a moment, when an unhesitating choice had become imperative, he was divided between sympathy with the people and pity for the King.

He returned to power without any plan of his own ; but finding Louis XVI. was pledged to assemble the States-General, he insisted that the representation of the Tiers Etat should be doubled, so as to balance the influence of the other two parties. Royalists affirm that this was a fatal error, since from that hour the Revolution became inevitable. Madame de Staël, jealous of her father's reputation, maintains that reasonable concessions on the part of the Court faction and the higher clergy would have nullified the danger of the double representation. But the point was that such an aristocracy and such a clergy were by nature unteachable ; and every moment wasted in attempting to persuade them was an hour added to the long torture of oppressed and starving France.

The kind heart, liberal instincts, and administrative

ability of Necker taught him that without the double representation the voice of the people might be lifted in vain. But the weakness of his character, and the awe of his bourgeois soul for the time-honoured fetish of monarchy, prevented his understanding that the power he invoked could never again be laid by any spell of his choosing. By seeking to arrange this or that ; to pare off something here and add something there—in a word, by trying to be just all round, when nobody cared for mutual justice but himself, he rendered a divided allegiance to his country and his King. If there were no conscious duplicity in his character, there was abundance of it in his opinions ; and to say that nobody could have succeeded better is to beg the question. In the face of the savage, inflexible arrogance of the aristocrats and clergy there was but one course open to a really high-minded man, and that was to leave the Court to its own devices, and, throwing himself with all of earnestness and wisdom that he possessed into the popular cause, to be guided by it, and yet govern it by force of sympathy and will.

He might have failed ; in the light of later events, it can even be said that he would have failed. But such a failure would have been grander, more vital for good and sterile for harm, than the opprobrium which eventually visited the honest Necker and pursued him to his grave.

Needless to say that opinions such as these never found their way into Madame de Staél's mind. On occasions — perhaps too frequently renewed — the portals of that enchanted palace were guarded by her heart. In her view, everything might yet be saved, were Necker only listened to and obeyed. "Every day he will do something good and prevent something

. bad," she wrote to the reactionary and angry Gustavus ; and thus betrayed that preoccupation with the individual, his virtues or his crimes, which, for all her intellect, blinded her not rarely to the essential significance of things.

With breathless interest and varied feelings of sympathy and indignation she watched the great events which now followed in rapid succession. Her father was monarchical, and believed that a representative monarchy on the English model was the true remedy for France. Madame de Staël—incapable of differing with so great a man—endorsed this opinion at the time, although eventually she became republican.

But nobody was republican then—that is in name ; people had not yet realised to what logical conclusions their opinions would carry them. Madame de Staël, hating oppression, blamed the sightless obstinacy of the nobles, but, on the other hand, was but little moved by the famous *Serment du Jeu de Paume*. She deplored the rejection of Necker's plan—that happy medium which was to settle everything, and stigmatised as it deserved the imbecility of the Court party, as illustrated by confidence in foreign regiments and the Declaration of the 23rd June. Always optimist, and confident of the inevitable triumph of Right over Might, she clung to the belief that a thoroughly pure character, in such a crisis, was the one indispensable element of success.

The mysterious nature of Sièyes repelled her ; she preferred the virtuous Malouet to the titanic Mirabeau, and was almost as blind as her father to the enormous electric force of the tribune's undisciplined genius. For if often prejudiced, she rarely was morbid, and false ideas did not dazzle her. No splendour of achievement

unaccompanied by loftiness of principle could win her applause. But she failed to grasp the fact that perfection of moral character, by its very scruples and hesitations, is necessarily handicapped in any race with the velocity of public events. No man can bring his entire self—very rarely can he even bring all that is best of himself—into a struggle with warring forces and contradictory individualities. In such a contest, swiftness of insight, power of expression, and force of organic impulse are the only factors of value. In supreme moments of action, men are greater than themselves—made so by the sudden, unconscious contraction of their complex personality into one flame-point of consuming will.

All this Madame de Staël seems never to have felt. If she loved unworthy people (and how many she did love!), it was because she deceived herself regarding them, as all her life she deceived herself about her father. She was intolerant of any triumph but that of virtue; and was thus rendered unjust to the great deeds of men who, imperfect and erring themselves, can sympathise with the aspirations of the human heart because its baseness is not unknown to them.

On the 11th of July, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, M. Necker, who had become a sort of Cassandra to the Court party and was detested in proportion, received a letter from the King ordering him to quit Paris and France, and to accomplish the departure with the utmost secrecy and despatch. He was at table with some guests when this order was handed to him; he read it, put it into his pocket, and continued his conversation as though nothing had happened.

Dinner over, he took Madame Necker aside, and informed her of what had occurred. Nothing was communicated to Madame de Staël; probably her

father thought she would be too much excited. M. and Madame Necker hastily ordered their carriage and, without bidding anybody farewell, without even delaying to change their clothes, they had themselves conveyed to the nearest station for post-horses. Thence they continued their journey uninterruptedly, fleeing like culprits from the people whose indignation was feared by the King.

Madame de Staël is lost in admiration of this single-minded conduct of her father, and lays especial stress on the fact that, even during the journey, he made no effort to win for himself the suffrages of the multitude. "Where is another man," she naïvely asks, "who would not have had himself brought back in his own despite?"

Certainly an ambitious man might have adopted this theatrical plan; but it is much more likely, under the actual circumstances, that an ambitious man would never have left at all. M. Necker had only to announce his disgrace to the people of Paris, and go over once for all to the popular side, to have received an intoxicating ovation. As it was, the news of his dismissal cast the capital into consternation. All the theatres were closed; medals were struck in the fallen Minister's honour; and the first cockade worn was green—the colour of his liveries. What a career might then have been his if, instead of being an obedient subject, he had chosen to be a leader!

Madame de Staël thought that it was to the last degree noble and disinterested of him to vanish from the sight of an adoring multitude rather than bring fresh difficulties on the master who had deserted him. But the destinies of a nation are of higher value than the comfort of a monarch; and there are certain

responsibilities which no man who does not feel himself incapable (and that was not Necker's case) is justified in declining. To throw back the love and influence offered him then for the last time by France; to sympathise with the popular cause and yet to abandon it; and to do all this out of obedience to the senseless caprice of a faction and the arbitrary command of a king, was to behave like a Court Chamberlain, but in no sense like a statesman.

The taking of the Bastille, and the King's declaration at the Hôtel de Ville, followed immediately on Necker's retirement. Madame de Staël records these events in a very few words, and shows herself, at the moment and henceforward through all the opening scenes of the Revolution, more alive to the humiliation and dismay of the Royal Family than to the apocalyptic grandeur of the catastrophe.

The acts committed, as one reads of them quietly now, are revolting in their mingled grotesqueness and terror. To those who witnessed them, they sickened where they did not deprave. The livid head of Foulon on the pike; the greasy, filthy, partly drunken populace, who rose as from the depths of the earth to invade the splendid privacy of royal Versailles; the degraded women dragged from shameful obscurity and paraded in the lurid glare of an indecent triumph; Madame de Lamballe's monstrous and dishonoured death; Marat's hellish accusations, and Robespierre's diseased suspicions, were things that must have destroyed in those who lived through them all capacity for admiration.

The fact that Madame de Staël did not lose heart

altogether remains an abiding witness to her faith and courage. She was wounded in her tenderest part by the Court's ingratitude and the Assembly's indifference towards her father. Every natural and cultivated sentiment in her was wounded by what she saw. Unlike Madame Roland, she had no traditions and no past of her own to attach her, in spite of everything, to the people. She was insensible to the merely physical infection of enthusiasm, and never even for a moment possessed by the vertigo of the revolutionary demon-dance. She remained, from first to last, an absolute stranger to every act and every consideration that was not either manifest to her intellect or strong in appeal to her heart; and yet such was her force of mind and rectitude of insight that, under the Directory, we shall find her no less interested in public events than under the Monarchy.

The grief that Madame de Staël undoubtedly experienced at her father's banishment was not destined to be of long duration. He had hardly reached the Hôtel des Trois Rois at Bâle, when, to his great astonishment, Madame de Polignac asked to speak to him. She was the last person that he expected to see there; but surprise at her presence was soon swallowed up in the far greater amazement excited by all she had to tell. The taking of the Bastille; the massacre of Foulon and Berthier and De Launay; the critical position of De Besenval, and the stampede of the aristocrats—what a catalogue of events! He had never, his daughter says, admitted the possibility of proscriptions, and he was a long while before he could understand the motives which had induced Madame de Polignac to depart. He had not much time to reflect on all he had heard before letters

from the King and from the Assembly arrived urging him to return. He did so most unwillingly, according to Madame de Staël, for the murders committed on the 14th July, although few in number, affrighted him, and "he believed no longer in the success of a cause now blood-stained." He seems to have abandoned all sympathy with the people from this moment, and to have returned avowedly with no intention than that of using his popularity as a buckler with which to defend the royal authority.

Madame de Staël, informed by letters from her father of his departure from France and ultimate destination (which was Germany), had hastened after him with her husband and overtook him first at Brussels. There the party had separated momentarily; M. Necker hurrying forward with the Baron de Staël, and Madame Necker, who was suffering in health, following by slower stages with her daughter. The consequence was that Madame de Staël arrived at Bâle after her father's interview with Madame de Polignac, and almost at the same time as he received the order to return.

In this way she had the profound joy of witnessing the enthusiasm which greeted him on every step of his way. No such ovation, she truly says, had ever before been bestowed upon an uncrowned head. Women fell on their knees as the carriage passed; the leading citizens of the towns where it stopped took the places of the postilions, and the populace finally substituted themselves for the horses. They met numbers of aristocratic fugitives on the journey, and M. Necker, at their request, showered on them autograph letters to serve as passports and enable them to cross the frontiers in safety.

Whenever the carriage stopped, the popular idol harangued the crowd and impressed on them the necessity of respecting persons and property; he entreated of them, as they professed so much love for him, to give him the most striking proof that they could of it, by always doing their duty. Madame de Staël says that her father was fully aware of the fleeting nature of popularity; and, under these circumstances, one wonders that he took the trouble, in such a crisis, to make so many speeches. But it is probable that the intoxication of praise was a little too much for him; and he had at all times the sacerdotal tendency to preach.

At ten leagues from Paris, news was brought to the travellers that De Besenval had been arrested by order of the Commune, and was to be taken to the capital, where he would, said the pessimists, be infallibly torn to pieces by the populace. M. Necker, entreated to intervene, took upon himself to rescind the order of the Commune, and promised to obtain the sanction of the authorities to his act.

On arriving in Paris, consequently, his first care was to proceed, in company with his family, to the Hôtel de Ville. The streets, the roofs, the windows of every house were densely thronged. Cries of "Vive Necker!" rent the air, as the redeemer of the country appeared on a balcony and began his discourse.

He demanded the amnesty of De Besenval and of all those who shared De Besenval's opinion. This extensive programme committed all those who accepted it to a reactionary policy, since to pardon the people's enemies unconditionally was to condone, and in a measure to sanction, their crimes.

But no such considerations presented themselves at that moment to impair Necker's triumph. The popular enthusiasm accorded him what he asked; fresh thunders of applause broke forth, and Madame de Staël, overcome with emotion, fainted.

## CHAPTER V.

MADAME DE STAËL IS COURAGEOUS FOR HER  
FRIENDS.

NECKER's victory over the rage of the populace was a fleeting one. He had, indeed, overstepped the prerogatives of a Minister in asking for the amnesty. Misled by the elation of his gratified vanity, and the impulse of his benevolent heart, he, an ardent defender of order, forgot that in placing himself between the Assembly and King on the one hand, and the people on the other, he practically recognised the right of a faction to act without the consent of the Government. It was for the latter to reverse the decree of the Commune and not for the electors of Paris.

His dream of smiling peace installed by his hand on the ruins of the Revolution was rudely and rapidly dispelled. Madame de Staël sorrowfully records that on the very evening of that glorious day the amnesty was retracted, and ascribes this result in great part to the influence of Mirabeau. But, in truth, a very little reflection must have sufficed to convince anybody that the utopian demands of Necker were singularly misplaced. The very electors who had acceded to them asserted that all they had ever intended was to

shield the arrested royalists from the fury of the populace, but in no sense from the action of justice. The Assembly confirmed this view, and from that moment Necker's influence was practically gone. It was proved to be a bubble ; and his triumph, respectable as were some of the motives which had urged him to invoke it, became ludicrous when contrasted with the stern and tragic realities of the moment. This Madame de Staël did not, could not see. She was fain to console herself with the compassionate reflection that, after all, De Besenval—an old man—was saved.

She narrates with dolorous pride the efforts honestly, courageously, and to a certain degree successfully, made by her father, during fifteen months, to avert the disaster of famine, and innocently appeals to them against the failure as a statesman to which she resolutely shuts her eyes.

One measure after another opposed by Necker was voted : the confiscation of the property of the clergy, the suppression of titles of nobility, and the emission of assignats. No popularity could have resisted such successive blows ; and Necker was popular no longer. Still, Madame de Staël touchingly begs the world, in her writings, not to allow itself to be turned from the paths of virtue by the spectacle of a good man so persecuted by fate. She claims our admiration for a series of quixotic acts, and is perpetually insisting on the amazing magnanimity which would not allow her father to become base because he had ceased to be useful.

\* Thoroughly discouraged at last—perhaps partly convinced that to preach kindness to savages, and self-abnegation to the vile, was a task to be resumed in better times—Necker tendered his resignation, and

had the mortification of seeing it accepted with perfect indifference both by the Assembly and the King.

Before leaving Paris for ever, he deposited in the royal treasury two millions of his own property. The exact object of this munificence is not clear: even Madame de Staël failed to explain it on any practical grounds. But she admired it extremely, and so may we.

The journey with the terrified and suffering Madame Necker to Switzerland was a great contrast to the return in the previous year to Paris. Then it had been "roses, roses all the way"; now it was nothing but insults. At Arcis-sur-Aube the carriage was stopped by an infuriated crowd, who accused M. Necker of having betrayed the cause of the people in the interests of the emigrant nobles. The accusation was an absurd one, since he had only endeavoured to be superhumanly kind to everybody. He had wished to preserve the people from crimes and starvation, the clergy from ruin, and the emigrant nobles from detection, and this was the result. It was hard but inevitable, and as there were many worse fates than M. Necker's in those days, one cannot quite free oneself from a feeling of impatience at Madame de Staël's perpetual lamentations over the inconceivable hardships of her parent's lot.

We now approach an episode in Madame de Staël's life which it is necessary to touch on with discretion. This is her connection with the Count Louis de Narbonne. The stories circulated in regard to them are familiar to all readers of Madame d'Arblay's memoirs. Dr. BurNEY thought himself in duty bound to warn his little Fanny against her growing adoration for Necker's great, but, according to him, not blameless daughter, who,

during her stay at Mickleham, exerted herself to win the friendship of the authoress of *Cecilia*. Fanny, as we know, was at first greatly shocked, and completely incredulous. She described Madame de Staël as loving M. de Narbonne tenderly, but so openly, and in a manner so devoid of coquetry, that friendship between two men, in her opinion, could hardly be differently manifested. But the seed of suspicion once cast in the little prude's mind, quickly germinated, and led eventually to a total cessation of her acquaintance with the woman whose brilliancy and goodness had so fascinated her. This is not the place in which to discuss Fanny's conduct; but was the information on which she based it correct? Who shall say? Madame de Staël was extremely imprudent, and she seems to have been dangerously near to loving a number of men.

Miss Berry, in her memoirs, accuses her of a "passion" for Talleyrand, and spoke as though concluding it to be a theme of common gossip. She certainly liked to absorb a great deal of her friends' affections, and was avowedly displeased when they married. Her sentiments towards Baron de Staël, full of a sweet and fresh cordiality at first, seems rapidly to have changed to aversion. As far as it is possible to judge, she unhesitatingly sacrificed him on all occasions to her filial love or her intellectual aims. When he was in Paris she left him in order to console M. Necker in his mournful retirement at Coppet. When he was at Coppet she remained in Paris, there to form and electrify a constitutional salon. Various anecdotes attest to the scandal uttered about her, and the truth of some of these stories admits of little doubt. But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that detraction is ever busiest with the greatest names;

that Madame de Staël, always preoccupied with her subject and never with herself, irritated the nerves and stirred the bile of inferior people who were proportionately gratified to hear her attacked; and that she lived in the midst of a society where conjugal fidelity was rare enough to be hardly believed in. Countless passages in her writings prove how exalted was her ideal of family life; and if they also prove her constant, restless yearning after some unattained, unattainable good, there is at least no sign of the satiety of exhausted emotion in them.\* Let us be content, then, that in many instances a veil should hide from us the deeper recesses of Madame de Staël's heart. Grant that there were two Germanines—one her father's daughter, lofty-minded, pure, catching the infection of exalted feelings, and incapable of error; the other her husband's wife, thrust into the fiery circle of human passion, thence to emerge a little scorched and harmed. The hidden centre of that dual self cannot be revealed to us; but what we do know is sometimes so grand and always so great that we can afford to be indulgent when reduced to conjecture.

In 1791, after having paid a visit of condolence to her father at Coppet, Madame de Staël had returned to Paris, and made her salon, the rallying-point for the most distinguished Constitutionels. Conspicuous among these, in principles although not in name, was De Narbonne, described by Madame de Staël herself as "*Grand seigneur, homme d'esprit, partisan et philosophe.*" He was a brilliant, an enlightened, a generous, and charming man. His sympathies were liberal; it would have been too much to expect from him that they should be subversive. He had been brought up in the enervating atmosphere of the Court,

yet had adopted many of the new ideas. After having accomplished the difficult and perilous enterprise of escorting the King's aunt, to Rome, and establishing them under the roof of the Cardinal de Bernis, he returned to Paris and ranged himself on the side of the Constitution. His soldier-soul (he was an extremely gallant officer) would not allow of his going any farther along the facile descent of change. The King's abortive attempt at escape and subsequent imprisonment in the Tuileries restored to Narbonne all the fervour which his allegiance as a courtier might originally have lacked. But he was a very intelligent man ; so much so, that Napoleon himself years later rendered justice to his sagacity. He had serious tastes and a great love of knowledge, and was almost as witty as Talleyrand himself. He was made Minister of War in December 1791, and the general impression prevailed that Madame de Staël's influence had contributed to his appointment. He was young and full of hope, and proposed to himself the impossible task of encouraging the action of the Assembly at the same time as he sought to reconstruct the popularity of the King. He also exerted himself to prepare France for resistance to the armies of foreign invaders ; visited the frontier ; reported the state of things there to the Assembly ; provisioned the forts ; re-established garrisons, and organized three armies. But what he could not do was to inspire anybody with confidence in himself. "Too black for heaven, too white for hell," he could neither rise to the sublime ineptitude of deluded royalism nor sink to the brutal logic of facts. Curtly dismissed by the King, at the end of three months, on resigning the portfolio he resumed the sword.

To defend his ungrateful sovereign was his religion, since, in spite of his talents, he did not reach the point of perceiving that there is a moment in the history of every nation when individuals must be sacrificed to principles. Perhaps this preoccupation of minds, naturally enlightened, with merely personal issues is the real key to all that was tragically mysterious in the Revolution. Madame de Staël herself deplored the fate of the King and Queen with precisely the same wealth of compassion that she would have expressed on the occasion of some catastrophe involving hundreds of obscure lives. It seemed as though only such sanguinary monomaniacs as Robespierre or St. Just, only such corrupt and colossal natures as Mirabeau or Danton, could look below the accidental circumstances of an event to its enduring elements. All that was morally and vitally, as distinguished from mentally and potentially, best in France threw itself into passionate defence of persons; while all that was strong, original, consistent, was drawn into the fatal policy of blood.

A few months after Narbonne's fall, Madame de Staël endeavoured to associate him in a plan which her party had suggested to her for the escape of the Royal Family. She wished to buy a property that was for sale near Dieppe. Thus furnished with a pretext for visiting the coast, she proposed to make three journeys thither. On the first two occasions she was to be accompanied by her eldest son, who was the age of the Dauphin, by a man resembling the King in height and general appearance, and by two women sufficiently like the Queen and Madame Elisabeth. In her third journey she would have left the original party behind and taken with her the whole

of the Royal Family. But the King and Queen refused to co-operate in this romantic and courageous plan. Their motives were not unselfish. Louis XVI. objected to Narbonne's share in the scheme; and Marie Antoinette, who regarded the double representation of the Tiers État as the cause of all her woes, detested Necker's daughter.

When the Tuileries was invaded by the mob, M. Necker, who was already at Coppet, and knew that the Baron de Staël had been recalled to Sweden, wrote urging his daughter to join him. But she was chained to Paris, fascinated by the very scenes that revolted her, and anxious to intervene, if only to save. She assisted, with slender sympathy for the revolutionaries, at the celebration of the 14th July in the Champs de Mars, and was wrung with pity for the tear-stained countenance of the Queen, whose magnificent toilette and dignified bearing contrasted with the squalor of her cortège. Madame de Staël's eyes were fixed with longing compassion on the figure of the King as he ascended the steps of the altar, there to swear for the second time to preserve the Constitution. His powdered head, so lately desecrated by the *bonnet rouge*, and gold-embroidered coat struck her imagination painfully as the vain symbols of vanished ease and splendour.

"Then came the terrible night of the 9th August, during which, from midnight to morning, the tocsins never ceased sounding. "I was at my window with some of my friends" (wrote Madame de Staël), "and every fifteen minutes the volunteer patrol of the Constitutionnels brought us news. We were told that the faubourgs were advancing headed by Santerre the brewer and Westermann. . . . Nobody could foresee

what would happen the next day, and nobody expected to survive it. . . . All at once (at 7 o'clock) came the terrible sound of cannon. 'In this first combat the Swiss Guards were victors.'

The tidings—partly false, as afterwards proved—were brought her of the massacre of Lally Tollendal, Narbonne, Montmorency, and others of her friends; and at once, regardless of peril, she went out in her carriage to hear if the news were true. After two hours of fruitless efforts to pass, she learnt that all those in whom she was most interested were still alive, but in hiding; and, as soon as the evening came, she sallied forth once more to visit them in the obscure houses where they had taken refuge. Later, she came to have but one thought, which was to save as many as she could of her friends. They were unwilling at first to take shelter in her house as being too conspicuous; but she would listen to no such objections. Two yielded to her persuasions, and one of these was Narbonne. He was shut up with his companion in the safest room, while the intrepid hostess established herself in the front apartments, and there, in great anxiety, awaited a domiciliary visit from the authorities. They were not long in coming and in demanding M. de Narbonne. To permit a search was practically to deliver up the victim. Madame de Staël's whole mind was consequently bent on averting investigation.

The police agents were exceptionally ignorant, and of this fact she was quick to take advantage. She began by instilling alarm into them as to the violation of rights which they committed in invading the house of an ambassador, and she followed this up by informing them that Sweden, being on the frontier of France,

would descend upon that offending land immediately. She next passed to pleasantries, and succeeded so well in cajoling her visitors that they finally allowed themselves to be gracefully bowed out. Four days later a false passport supplied by a friend of Madame de Staél allowed Narbonne to escape to England.

The Swedish ambassadress herself could easily have left France at any moment, but she lingered on from day to day, unwilling to quit the country while so many of her friends were in danger; and she was rewarded at last by the opportunity of interfering to save Jaucourt, who had been conveyed to the Abbaye—now aptly named “the Ante-chamber of Death.” Madame de Staél knew none of the members of the Commune, but, with her unfailing presence of mind, she remembered that one of them, Manuel, the *procureur*, had some pretensions to be literary. These pretensions being greater than his talent, Madame de Staél rightly concluded that he possessed sufficient vanity to be moved by solicitation. She wrote to ask for an interview, which was accorded her for the next morning at 7 o’clock in the official’s own house.

“The hour was democratic,” she remarks; but she was careful to be punctual. Her eloquence achieved an easy victory over Manuel; who, unlike so many of his colleagues, was no fanatic; and on the 1st of September he made Madame de Staél happy by writing to inform her that, thanks to his good offices, Jaucourt had been set at liberty.

She now, at last, determined to quit France the next day, but not alone. Resolute to the end in risking her life for that of others, she consented to take the Abbé de Montaquin with her in the disguise of a domestic, and convey him safely into Switzerland. A

passport obtained for one of her servants was given to one of his, and a place on the high road indicated as a rendezvous where the Abbé was to join her suite.

When the next morning dawned a fresh element of terror had invaded the public mind. The news of the fall of Longwy and Verdun had arrived and Paris was in effervescence. Again in all the sections the tocsin was sounding ; and everybody whose own life was his chief preoccupation, kept as quiet as possible. But Madame de Staél could not keep quiet—that was impossible for her at all times—and at this moment the image paramount in her mind was that of the poor Abbé waiting anxiously at his rendezvous—perhaps only to be discovered if his generous deliverer delayed.

Turning a deaf ear to all remonstrance, she started in a travelling-carriage drawn by six horses, and accompanied by her servants in gala livery. This was an unfortunate inspiration. Instead of filling the minds of the vulgar with awe, as she had vainly hoped, it aroused their vigilant suspicions. The carriage had hardly passed under the portals of the hotel before it was surrounded by a furious crowd of old women, "risen from hell," as Madame de Staél energetically expressed it, who shrieked out that she was carrying away the gold of the nation. This intelligent outcry brought a new contingent of exasperated patriots of both sexes, who ordered the fugitive Ambassadress to be conveyed to the Assembly of the Section nearest at hand.

She did not lose her presence of mind, but on descending from the carriage found an opportunity of bidding the Abbé's servant rejoin his master, and tell him of what had happened. This step proved to be a

very dangerous one. The President of the Section informed Madame de Staël that she was accused of seeking to take away proscribed royalists, and that he must proceed to a roll-call of her servants. One of them was missing, naturally; having been despatched to save his own master; and the consequence was a peremptory order to Madame de Staël to proceed to the Hôtel de Ville under charge of a gendarme. Such a command was not calculated to inspire her with any sentiment but fear. Several people had already been massacred on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville; and although no woman had yet been sacrificed to popular fury, there was no guarantee for such immunity lasting; and, as a point of fact, the Princess de Lamballe fell the very next day.

Madame de Staël's passage from the Faubourg Saint Germain to the Hôtel de Ville lasted three hours. Her carriage was led at a foot-pace through an immense crowd, which greeted her with reiterated cries of "Death!" It was not herself they detested, she says, but the evidences of her luxury; for the news of the morning had brought more opprobrium than ever on the execrated name of aristocrat. Fortunately, the gendarme who was inside the carriage was touched by his prisoner's situation and her delicate condition of health, and her prayers, and promised to do what he could to defend her. By degrees her courage rose. She knew that the worse moment must be that in which she would reach the Place de Grève; but by the time she arrived there, aversion for the mob had almost overcome in her every feeling but disdain.

She mounted the steps of the Hôtel de Ville between a double row of pikes; and one man made a movement to strike her. Thanks to the prompt interposition of

the friendly gendarme, she was able, however, to reach the presence of Robespierre in safety. The room in which she found him was full of an excited crowd of men, women, and children, all furiously shrieking, "*Vive la Nation!*"

The Swedish Ambassadress was just beginning to protest officially against the treatment she had met with, when Manuel arrived on the scene. Never was any apparition more opportune. Greatly astonished to see his late illustrious visitor in such a position, he promptly undertook to "answer for her" until the Commune had made up its mind what to do with her; and conveying her and her maid to his own house, shut them up in the same cabinet where Madame de Staël had pleaded for Jaucourt.

There they remained for six hours, "dying of hunger, thirst, and fear." The windows of the room looked out upon the Place de Grève, and consequently offered the spectacle of bands of yelling murderers returning from the prisons "with bare and bleeding arms."

Madame de Staël's travelling carriage had remained in the middle of the square. She expected to see it pillaged; but a man in the uniform of the National Guard came to the rescue, and passed two hours in successfully defending the luggage.

This individual turned out to be the redoubtable Santerre. He introduced himself later in the day to Madame de Staël, and took credit for his conduct on the ground of the respect with which M. Necker had inspired him when distributing corn to the starving population of Paris.

In the evening Manuel, pallid with horror at the events of that awful day, took Madame de Staël back

to her own house, through streets of which the obscurity was only relieved at moments by the lurid glare of torches. He told her that he had procured a new passport for herself and her maid alone; and that she was to be escorted to the frontier by a gendarme.

The next day Tallien arrived, appointed by the Commune to accompany her to the barriers. Several suspected aristocrats were present when he was announced. Most people under such circumstances would have taken care to be found alone; but Madame de Staël remained undaunted to the end. She simply begged Tallien to be discreet, and he fortunately proved so. A few more difficulties had to be encountered before she was fairly in safety; but at last she reached the pure air and peaceful scenes of the Jura.

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## CHAPTER VI.

## MADAME DE STAEL RETIRES TO COPPET.

MADAME DE STAEL arrived at Coppet about the beginning of September 1792. The life there, after her recent experiences in Paris, so far from seeming to her one of welcome rest, fretted her ardent spirit, almost beyond endurance. She longed to be back in France, even under the shadow of the guillotine, anywhere but in front of the lake, with its inexorable beauty and maddening calm.

"The whole of Switzerland inspires me with magnificent horror," she wrote to her husband, who was still in Sweden. "Sometimes I think that if I were in Paris with a title which they would be forced to respect, I might be of use to a number of individuals, and with that hope I would brave everything. I perceive, with some pain, that the thing which least suits me in the world, is this peaceful and rustic life. I have put down my horses for economy's sake, and because I feel my solitude less when I do not see anybody."

By "anybody" it is to be presumed that she meant the good Swiss, whose expressions of horror, doubtless as monotonous as reiterated, must have been irritating

to one whose single desire night and day, was to cast herself into the arena there to combat and to save. One outlet she found for her activity in perpetual plans for enabling her friends, and often her enemies, to escape from Paris.

The scheme which she projected was to find some man or woman, as the case might be, who would enter France with Swiss passports, certificates, &c., and after getting these properly *visés*, would hand them over to the person who was to be saved.

Nothing could be simpler, Madame de Staël averred ; and as she provided money, time, thought, energy, and presumably infected her agents with a little of her own enthusiasm, her efforts were often successful. Among those who engaged her attention were Mathieu de Montmorency, François de Jaucourt, the Princess de Poix, and Madame de Simiane.

Among the people whom she saved, and whose rescue she records with the most complacency, is that of young Achille du Chayla. He was a nephew of De Jaucourt's, and was residing at Coppet under a Swedish name—(M. de Staël had lent himself to many friendly devices of that kind). The news came that Du Chayla, when trying to escape across the frontier under cover of a Swiss passport, had been arrested at a frontier town on suspicion of being what he truly was—a refugee Frenchman. Nevertheless, the authorities declared themselves willing to release him if the Lieutenant Baillival of Nyon would attest that he was Swiss. What was to be done? To bring M. Reverdil, the functionary aforesaid, to such a declaration seemed well-nigh hopeless, and Jaucourt was in despair. His nephew, if once his identity were discovered, had no chance of escape from death; for not only was his

name on the list of the suspected ones, but his father actually held a command under Condé's banner. This was one of the opportunities in which Madame de Staël delighted. Her spirits rose at once in the face of such difficulties. Fortunately, M. Reverdil was an old friend of her family; she believed that she would be able to melt him, and she hurried away to try.

The task was more arduous than she had anticipated. M. Reverdil (by her own confession one of the most enlightened of Swiss magistrates) turned out to have a sturdy conscience and an uncomfortable amount of common sense. He represented to his ardent visitor, first, that he would be wrong in uttering a falsehood for any motive; next, that in his official position he might compromise his country by making a false attestation. "If the truth be discovered," he urged, "we shall no longer have the right of claiming our own compatriots when arrested in France; and thus I should jeopardise the interest of those who are confided to me for the sake of saving a man towards whom I have no duties." M. Reverdil's arguments had "a very plausible side," Madame de Staël allowed thus much herself; but the good man little knew with whom he had to deal if he thought that such cold justice would have the least effect on his petitioner. She swept all paltry considerations as to the remote danger of unknown unromantic Swiss burghers to the winds. Her object was to bring back to Jancourt the assurance of his young nephew's safety; and from this no abstract principles could turn her.

She remained two hours with M. Reverdil, arguing, entreating, imploring. The task she proposed to herself was, in her own words, "to vanquish his conscience by his humanity." He remained inflexible for

a long while, but his visitor reiterating to him, "If you say No, an only son, a man without reproach, will be assassinated within twenty-four hours, and your simple word will have killed him," he ultimately succumbed. Madame de Staël says it was his emotion that triumphed; it is just possible that it was sheer physical exhaustion. Madame de Staël was at no time a quiet person to deal with; when excited, as in the present instance, she must have been overpowering.

It was shortly after these events that Madame de Staël visited England, and, while there, went to Mickleham, there to be introduced to, and for a time to captivate, Fanny Burney. Except Talleyrand, she was the most illustrious of the brilliant band of exiles gathered together at Juniper Hall, and familiar to all readers of the memoirs of Madame d'Arblay and the journal of Mrs. Phillips. It is well known how Fanny withdrew from her intimacy with the future author of *Corinne* on learning the stories which connected the latter's name with Narbonne. Mrs. Phillips herself was much more indulgent, and Madame de Staël appears to have felt a grateful liking for her; but it is evident that she was deeply hurt at Fanny's coldness. The approbation of a nature so narrow could hardly have affected her much, one would think, and yet it is plain that she longed for it—she longed, indeed, all her life for such things as she possessed not. She could sacrifice her wishes at all times generously and unregretfully, but she never knew how to bear being denied one of them.

In all the glimpses one obtains of Madame de Staël in different countries and from different people, she never seems quite so womanly, so imperfect and yet so pathetic, as in these journals of Mrs. Phillips.

Perhaps the reason of it is that one divines in her at this time a sentiment which, if erring, was simple and *true*, while many of her later sorrows gained a kind of factitious grandeur from the train of political circumstances attendant on them. Mrs. Phillips was present when Madame de Staël received the letter which summoned her to rejoin her husband at Coppet, and relates the effect produced upon her. She was most frankly inconsolable, spoke again and again of her sorrow at going, and made endless entreaties to Mrs. Phillips to attend to the wants, spirits, and affairs of the friends whom she was leaving. She even charged her with a message of forgiveness for the ungrateful Fanny, and fairly sobbed when parting with Mrs. Folk.

Madame de Staël did not leave Coppet again until after the Revolution. Her life seems to have passed with a monotony that the long drama of horror slowly culminating in Paris rendered tragically sombre. She continued her efforts—every day more difficult of accomplishment and sterile of results—to save her friends and foes; and when the Queen was arraigned, she wrote, in a few days, that eloquent and well-known defence of her which called down upon the writer the applause of every generous heart in Europe.

The Neckers during this period seem to have seen very little society. Gibbon was almost their only friend; and in 1794 he went to England, and a few months later died. The next to go was Madame Necker herself. She had long been ill, and her last few months of life were embittered by cruel pain. She had prepared for her end with the minute and morbid care that might have been expected from her. The tomb at Coppet in which she rests, together with her husband and daughter, was built in conformity with

her wishes, and in great part under her eyes. She died on 6th May 1794. M. Necker felt her death acutely, and for months not even his daughter's sympathy could console him. Madame Necker had one of those self-tormenting natures which poison the existence of others in embittering their own. Too noble to be slighted, and too exacting to be appeased, they work out the doom of unachieved desires; and when they go to be wrapt in eternal mystery, their parting gift to their loved ones is a vague remorse and doubting. Silent themselves when they might have spoken, they leave an unanswered question in the hearts of their survivors. Monsieur Necker, with his exaggerated consciousness, must have asked himself repeatedly if he had cared for his strange and loving wife enough. Madame de Staël mourned her mother sincerely, but it is clear that the keenest edge of her grief came from contemplation of her father's.

Three months had not elapsed after Madame Necker's death when the 9th Thermidor dawned, and at its close, all sanguinary as that appalling termination was, France drew one long sigh of inconceivable relief, for Robespierre had fallen. The Directory followed, and Baron de Staël having been re-nominated to his post, his wife lost no time in hurrying back to Paris. There, true to her indefatigable self, she immediately set about obtaining the eradication of her friends' names from the list of the proscribed *émigrés*. From this moment her opinions, and with them her character, underwent a certain change. She had been a moderate royalist; she became avowedly a republican. But her republicanism was of a strangely abstract and eclectic sort, and it was dashed with so many personal leanings towards

monarchs, that it resulted in nothing better than a spirit of intrigue.

She could not understand that the law, whatever it may be, which governs circumstances, makes no account of individuals. She believed that, by causing Mathieu de Montmorency and Talleyrand to be recalled from exile, and inspiring Benjamin Constant with the loftiest ideals, she could obliterate the blood-stained past and reverse the logic of events. When everybody (everybody, that is, whom she cared about) should have been restored to peace, prosperity, and the air of France, she conceived that the study of metaphysical systems and the cultivation of the affections would alone be needed to re-model and perfect humanity.

With this in view she toiled and plotted unceasingly, clasping the hands of regicides like Barras, rubbing skirts with such women as Madame Tallien, and sacrificing her own pet ideal of womanly duty, which consisted, as she repeatedly proclaimed, in loving and being loved, and leaving the jarring strife of politics to men.

Had she remained in France, she must inevitably have been betrayed into greater inconsistencies still. But, fortunately for her fame, her intellect, and her character, the period was approaching in which Bonaparte's aversion was to condemn her to a decade of illustrious exile.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE TRANSFORMED CAPITAL.

EN all its varied story, the world probably never offered a stranger spectacle than that presented by Paris when Madame de Staël returned to it in 1795. The mixture of classics was only equalled by the confusion of opinions, and these, in their turn, were proclaimed by the oddest contrasts in costumes. *Muscadins* in grey coats and green cravats, twirled their canes insolently in the faces of wearers of greasy *carmagnoles*; while the powdered pigtails of reactionaries announced the aristocratic contempt of their wearers for the close-cropped heads of the Jacobins.

To the squalid orgies in the streets, illuminated by stinking oil-lamps, and varicd by the rumble of the tumbrils, had succeeded the salons where Josephine Beauharnais displayed her Creole grace, and *Notre Dame de Thermidor* sought to wield the social sceptre of decapitated princesses. Already royalism had revived, although furtively, and fans on which the name of the coming King could be read but by initiated eyes, were passed from hand to hand in the cafés of "Coblenz." A strange light-hearted nervous gaiety—intoxicating as champagne—had dissipated the lurid

gloom of the Terror; the dumbness of horror had given way to a reckless contempt for tyranny. A sordid, demented mania for speculation had invaded all classes, and refined and delicate women trafficked in pounds of sugar or yards of cloth.

An enormous sensation was produced by Ducancel's *Nouveaux Aristides, ou l'Intérieur des Comités Révolutionnaires*, a comedy in which its author distilled into every line the hoarded bitterness of his soul against the Jacobins.

Barras flaunted his cynical sensuality and shameless waste in the face of a bankrupt society; and austere revolutionaries, beguiled into the enervating atmosphere of the gilded salons, sold their principles with a stroke of the same pen that restored some illustrious proscribed one to his family. "Every one of us was soliciting the return of some *émigré* among his friends," writes Madame de Staël. "I obtained several recalls at this period; and in consequence the deputy Legendre, almost a man of the people, denounced me from the tribune of the Convention. The influence of women, and the power of good society, seemed very dangerous to those who were excluded, but whose colleagues were invited to be seduced. One saw on *decadis*, for Sundays existed no longer, all the elements of the old and new régime united, but not reconciled."

Into this seething world Madame de Staël threw herself with characteristic activity. Legendre's attack upon her, foiled by Barras, could not deter her from interference. Her mind being fixed upon some ideal Republic, she was anxious to blot out all record of past intolerance. The prospect of restoring an aristocrat to his home, or of shielding him from fresh

dangers, invariably proved irresistible to her. Nevertheless she was quick to perceive and to signalize the folly of the reactionaries ; and she felt but scant sympathy with the mad attempt at a monarchical restoration known in history as the 13th Vendémiaire. She uttered no word of palliation for the massacres committed by the Royalists in Lyons and Marseilles, and she was more than willing to admit the benefits conferred on France by the first six months of the Government of the Directory.

But she could not be happy at the continued exclusion of the nobles and clericals ; and any appeal from one of them touched her with all the force of old association. Talleyrand had not returned from America when her eloquence induced Chénier to address the Convention in favour of his recall. Montesquion next claimed her attention ; and in consequence of all this she became an object of suspicion and was accused of exciting revolt. The Government, indeed, thought her so dangerous that, at one moment, when she was at Coppet, they ordered her to be arrested and brought to Paris, there to be imprisoned. Barras, however, defended her, as she relates, "with warmth and generosity," and, thanks to him, she was enabled to return, a free agent, to France.

Throughout the events preceding the *coup d'Etat* of the 18th Fructidor, Madame de Staël was keenly alive to the danger which threatened and eventually overtook her friends among the Moderates. To act, in these circumstances, was with her a second nature. Her relations with Barras had naturally become very friendly ; and she used her influence to obtain the nomination of Talleyrand to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "His nomination was the only part

"that I took in the crisis preceding the 18th Fructidor, and which I hoped by such means to avert," she wrote. "One was justifiel in hoping that the intelligence of M. de Talleyrand would bring about a reconciliation between the two parties. Since then I have not had the least share in the different phases of his political career."

There is a ring of disappointment in these words; but how could Madame de Staël, with her supposed infallible insight, ever have believed in such a nature?

"It is necessary to serve someone," was the answer of a noble when reproached for accepting the office of chamberlain to one of Napoleon's sisters. Madame de Staël records the reply with scorn; but she should, one thinks, have recognised the fibre of just such a man in the Bishop of Autun. The proscription extending on all sides after the 18th Fructidor, Madame de Staël's intervention became unceasing. She learnt the danger incurred by Dupont de Nemours, according to her "the most chivalrous champion of liberty" France possessed, and straightway she betook herself to Chénier, who, two years previously, had made the speech to which Talleyrand owed his recall. Her eloquence soon fired the nervous, violent-natured, but imaginative author, and, hurrying to the tribune, he succeeded in saving Dupont de Nemours, by representing him as a man of eighty, whereas he was barely sixty. This device displeased the very person in whose favour it was adopted; but Madame de Staël saved her friends in spite of themselves.

So much energy could not be displayed with impunity, and the Committee of Public Safety caused a hint to be conveyed to the Baron de Staël, which induced his wife to retire for a short time to the

country. According to Thibaudeau, indeed, the hint was in the first instance a distinct order to quit France, and M. de Staël cut a somewhat sorry figure when appearing before the Committee to protest against it. In spite of his "embarrassed air" and "want of dignity," he managed to convey to his hearers that to expel the wife of an ambassador would be a violation of rights; and after some discussion the decree was withdrawn. Nevertheless, probably yielding to the prudent representations of her husband, Madame de Staël did retire for a while, and took refuge with a friend. We may suppose that she felt greatly aggrieved and ill-used, and yet it cannot be denied that her qualities—rare and noble though they might be—were not of a nature to recommend her to a Revolutionary Government. One can even affirm that they were not of a sort to recommend her to any Government. Her talents, her wealth, and her position gave her immense social power. When she used this, as she repeatedly did, to inspire officials with disobedience to orders, and to save the lives of reactionary prisoners at the risk of ruining radical functionaries, it is not to be wondered at if the selfish majority regarded her interference as exceedingly pernicious.

It may even be questioned whether her influence at this time was intrinsically valuable. Her state of excited feeling kept her floating between sympathy with principles and sympathy with individuals. The result was an eclecticism of feeling, which reflected itself in the composition of her salon. Had she been able to declare herself frankly either Monarchical or Republican, she might have left some lasting impress on the destinies of her land. As it was, she was kept in a condition of restless activity which, while sterile

of intellectual results, brought her into disrepute as a conspirator.

The time was now rapidly approaching when Bonaparte was to cross her path, and, as she chose to conceive it, to spoil her existence. The instrument of destiny, in this instance, was Benjamin Constant. Immediately after the fall of Robespierre he arrived—a young old man, world-weary, full of unsteady force, and warmed by an inner flame of passion that sometimes smouldered but never died down.

A Bernese noble, he had been reared in aristocratic prejudices, but his life was early embittered by domestic circumstances and the political conditions of his country. After being educated at Oxford, Edinburgh, and in Germany, he was forced by his father to accept the post of Chamberlain at the Court of Brunswick. Ariel in the cloven pine was not more heart-sick, with the difference that Constant's "delicate" spirit was dashed by a vein of mephistophelian mockery. Some malignant fairy seemed to have dinked to his flashing and unerring insight a disposition the most cynical of which man ever carried the burden through sixty-three years of life. Being utterly unwarped by illusion, he could place himself on the side of opposition with telling effect, for he could neither deceive himself nor be deceived by others; and if not rigidly conscientious, he was inexorably logical.

At war with the authorities of his native land, too familiarized with order to be further charmed by it, and tired of the solemn absurdities of Court functions, he turned his thoughts towards revolutionary Paris as being, perhaps, the one city in the world which could still afford him a fresh sensation. Moreover, every element of originality and audacity in his

brilliant mind was attracted by the amazing spectacle then presented by the Convention. A Government which, deprived of organized armies, money, or traditions, confronted with a European coalition, and weighted with the responsibility of crime, had conquered its enemies in the field, and made its will respected from the Pyrenees to the Rhine, was exactly of a kind to fascinate a born combatant like Constant. He arrived eager to be initiated into that strange world; longing to find himself in the salons of Madame Tallien, Josephine Beauharnais, and Madame de Staël.

Hitherto his Egeria had been Madame de Charrière, a charming middle-aged mistress, Dutch by birth, but French by right of intellect and choice of language. Her delicate penetration and subtle sympathy with minor moods had doubtless for years responded precisely to his ideal; for if she might not excite, neither could she bore him; and she must have understood his fastidious notions even before he could express them. She was, in fact, perfection as long as he was still too young to mind feeling old; but there necessarily came a moment when that unconscious comedy was played out. The fitful energy of his nature had gradually vanquished his early lassitude, and he needed to renew his utterances at the founts of some Sybilline inspiration.

Madame de Staël appears simply to have overwhelmed him; and the effect which he produced on her was not less startling. Her salon was the rallying-ground of contradictory individualities. She believed in those days that she could reconcile Irreconcilables, and she welcomed Conventionnels liked Chénier and Roederer, stranded "survivals" of a vanished epoch

like Suard, Morellet, and Laharpe ; and aristocrats, some of them altogether soured and worn out, like Castellane, Choiseul, and Narbonne. Into this political menagerie Constant fell like a spirit from another world. Applauding the Revolution, yet having played no part in it, he was its virgin knight. There was something strange and attractive, also, in his appearance : a certain awkwardness in figure and gesture joined to a handsome, clever young face and long fair hair. Just at that moment (1795) the predominant tendency in Madame de Staël's salon was hostile to the Government. She professed herself already to be converted to Republicanism, and probably was so in theory, but she had not yet overcome her aversion to the real revolutionaries. Either directly through her influence, or with her tacit consent, Constant was induced to publish three letters protesting against the admission of two-thirds of the old Convention into the new body of Representatives. The success which followed was prodigious. All the women of the Royalist party flattered and caressed him ; and all the journalists extolled him to the skies. Constant, however, was not the man to bear that kind of petting long ; he required excitement with some keener edge to it, and was, moreover, too logical, too naturally enlightened and liberal, to endorse reactionary platitudes. He hastened to disavow the letters ; and although he did not find it easy to disabuse the public mind of its first impression, he was careful not to deepen this by any further mistakes. During the following four years, his intimacy with Madame de Staël flourished and grew apace. They acted and reacted upon one another by the law of their opposing natures. His ardour was as uncertain as hers was

steady; but whenever he caught fresh fire, it came from her. On the other hand, the tormenting kind of cruelty which belonged to his cynical caprice seems to have cast a spell over Madame de Staël's own warm and frank simplicity which she found it difficult to break.

To Constant at this time belongs the merit of having appreciated her thoroughly and defended her warmly—if not invariably, at any rate in his truer moments. On his very first meeting with her, which was in Switzerland, she enthralled him instantaneously; perhaps all the more so that, like most people, he had been prejudiced against her by hearsay. He wrote to Madame de Charrière, who seems to have felt and expressed some bitterness regarding his new acquaintance, that she should get rid of the idea that Madame de Staël was nothing more than a "talking machine."

He praised her lively interest in everyone who suffered, and her courage in scheming for the escape of her friends and enemies. He admitted that she might be active partly because she could not help it; but silenced further carping by the remark that her activity was well employed. In about a month more, his admiration had risen to enthusiasm, and he could hardly find words in which to praise the brilliancy and accuracy of mind, the exquisite goodness, the generosity and social politeness, the simplicity and charm of his latest friend. He declared that she knew just as well how to listen as to talk (a point on which many both before and after Madame de Charrière differed from him), and that she enjoyed the talents of other people quite as much as her own. This was perfectly true. No woman ever breathed who was less envious than Madame de Staël; but, on the other

hand, what woman's intellect was ever so unapproachable? At the time, however, of her first acquaintance with Constant, her literary reputation was still to make, and it is not to be wondered at, consequently, if Madame de Charrière felt more inclined to question than agree when informed that this restless female politician was a being of so superior a sort that her like could not be met with once in a century.

About 1796 Madame de Staël took a new departure. Perhaps thanks to Constant's enlightened views, perhaps, thanks merely to her own common sense, she felt the full futility of reactionary effort, and ranged herself frankly on the side of the Directory. The royalist Club de Clichy was by this time an accomplished fact; and to neutralize its mischievous influence the Cercle Constitutionnel had been formed at the Hôtel de Salm. For some time Madame de Staël was the soul of these meetings, and Constant was their orator. Finally, when a fresh division in the Convention declared itself, and a large number of deputies deserted the Directory, Madame de Staël and Constant exerted themselves to prove that such dissensions could profit only the two extremes of Royalists or Terrorists, but never the Moderates. Naturally, the latter were deaf (when have Moderates eyes to see or ears to hear in moments of vital significance?), and Madame de Staël's worst previsions were justified by the events of the 18th Fructidor. The establishment, two years later, of the Consulate, while filling Madame de Staël's noble soul with dismay, offered Constant the opportunity assigned to him by his talents. He entered then upon the course of opposition from which he did not again deviate until sixteen years later, when he yielded either to Napoleon's personal charm, the fasci-

nation of his deeds, and the hope of his repentance, or to the profound disgust of a world-worn man with the imbecility of the Restoration.

This is how Constant, in 1800, described the state of the public mind in France :—

"The predominating idea was : Liberty has done us harm, and we wish for it no longer ; and those who modestly pointed out to these candidates for slavery that the evils of the Revolution came precisely from the fact that the Revolution had suspended liberty, were hounded through the salons under the names of Jacobins and Anarchists. A nation which begged for slavery from a military chieftain of thirty, who had covered himself with glory, might count upon its wishes being gratified ; and they were."

These few lines are a good example of Constant's incisive intellect and biting style. Another man with such gifts would have retired disgusted from all opposition; but Constant loved fighting for its own sake. Perhaps he loved the combat better than the cause; but that is one of the secrets which it is given to no one to fathom. Whatever the central motive, the final fact of his complex and interesting nature, he proved himself the ideal leader of a forlorn hope.

By the contemporaries of Constant and Madame de Staël, the connection between these two brilliant minds was, as might be expected, variously judged. Later critics have asserted that he was completely under her influence, but it is more likely that his native cynicism and spurious passion alternately irritated and dominated her. She may have inspired, but she could not mould, a nature so original and perverse.

Chênedollé said of Madame de Staël about this time, that she had more intelligence than she could manage,

and in this there was probably some truth. She had hardly begun to write as yet, having published (besides some pamphlets) only the *Letters on Rousseau*, and her work on the *Passions*. Her turbulence of ideas, scarcely then reduced to any system, must necessarily have been crystallised at moments by contact with a more definite mind.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

## MADAME DE STAËL MEETS NAPOLEON.

THE hostility between Madame de Staël and Napoleon was inevitable; since not a single point of sympathy existed between them. Her moral superiority, unselfishness, romantic ardour, and sincerity, were precisely the qualities for which he would feel contempt, as being incompatible with the singleness of individual purpose, serene indifference to suffering, and calm acceptance of means which are necessary to material success. Madame de Staël was intimately convinced that not only honesty, but every other virtue constituted the best policy. Napoleon treated all such amiable theories as mere sentimentalism. If occasionally sensual from love of excitement, he was essentially passionless, and looked upon women as toys, not as sentient beings. He hated them to have ideas of their own; he liked them to be elegant, graceful, and pretty. He was brought into contact with Madame de Staël—a woman overflowing with passion, energy and intellect, large of person, loud of voice, careless in attire. She had generally found her eloquence invincible, and he meant nothing to be

invincible but his system. She had every reason to believe in her talent, and proclaimed that belief somewhat obstreperously; while he was disgusted at not being able to differ from her, and at finding that there was still one light which could shine unquenched beside his star. He usually succeeded in repressing people so entirely, as to leave alive in them no possibility of protest; but she was, by her nature, irrepressible. It is true that she records having felt suffocated in his presence; but such a feeling could not have endured in her long. A very little familiarity would have transformed it into impatient rebellion. For Napoleon society, with a few exceptions, was composed of dummies, some of them a little more tangible and resisting than others, consequently more difficult to thrust out of the way. The individual had no intrinsic value for him, but was simply a factor in the sum of success. Madame de Staël admired everybody who was clever, loved everybody who was good, pitied everybody who was sorrowful. She detested oppression, and fought against it and conquered, if not materially, at least morally, although sometimes she hardly foresaw, when engaging in it, how much the fight would cost her. In the beginning of her acquaintance with him, Madame de Staël evidently entertained an admiration for Napoleon, greater than that which she eventually cared to avow. Bourrienne goes so far as to assert that she was in love with him, and that she wrote him perfervid letters, which he disdainfully threw into the fire. It is not necessary to accept the whole of this story. Bourrienne as a returned *émigré* can have felt but a meagre sympathy for Madame de Staël, and he probably yielded to the temptation of making his

account of her as piquant as possible. But as she never did anything by halves, and always wrote with the most unconventional ardour, it is certain that her first sentiments towards the conqueror of Italy were expressed in a form to weary rather than gratify him. She presumably praised him for views which he did not hold, and for a disinterestedness that he was far from feeling. He must have understood that to an intellect such as hers, the first shock of disappointment would bring enlightenment, and then his schemes would be penetrated before they were ripe for execution. Add to all these elements of antipathy the fact that every intelligent man in Paris would find his way to Madame de Staël's salon, with the further fact that she herself was not to be silenced, and it becomes easy to understand how Bonaparte could condescend from his greatness to hate her.

His aversion, owing to his Italian blood, had a strain of Pulcinello-like malignity, and every fresh outbreak of clamour from his victim only roused him to strike harder. That he should exile her in the first instance was not only comprehensible but justifiable. He had undertaken a gigantic task, that of accomplishing by the single force of his own will, and in the brief space of his own life-time, what, in the natural course of events, would have required the slow action of generations. That is, he sought to weld into his own system the mobile, alert, and impressionable mind of France.

To crush a thing so impalpable, to extinguish a thing so fiery, was an impossible undertaking, and to anybody but Napoleon, it must have seemed so. He, at least, so far understood its magnitude, as to appreciate the full danger of even a momentary reaction. And what, in that sombre but electric atmosphere,

charged with suppressed fire, was so likely to provoke a reaction as the influence of Madame de Staël—a woman of amazing talent, of high position, and great wealth; notoriously disinterested, and, although ever true to her principles, yet strongly swayed by personal influences.

Moreover, she represented the Opposition. Let anybody consider what public opinion is, even in well-ordered England, how it reverses in a moment the best laid plans of Ministers, and it becomes easy to understand how, in revolutionary France, a new thought emanating from Madame de Staël's salon could prove gravely dangerous to Napoleon. In exiling her, he only treated her as she had been treated already. If he found her in France on coming to power, it was because she had been reconciled to the Directory; but there never was the least chance of her becoming reconciled to him.

There are several very womanly touches in Madame de Staël's own account of her relations with Napoleon. Here is one of them, relating apparently to a time when the aversion between the First Consul and his illustrious foe had become an accomplished but not an acknowledged fact. Madame de Staël was invited to General Berthier's one evening when it was known that Napoleon would be present.

"As I knew," she says, "that he spoke very ill of me, it struck me that he would address me with some of the rude things which he often liked to say to women, even to those who flattered him; and I wrote down on chance, before going to the party, the different stinging and spirited replies which I could make to his speeches. I did not wish to be taken by surprise if he insulted me, for that would have been a greater want

of character even than of wit ; and as nobody could be sure of remaining at ease with such a man, I had prepared myself beforehand to defy him. Fortunately, it was unnecessary ; he only put the most insignificant question in the world to me, for . . . he never attacks except where he feels himself to be the stronger."

The whole of this passage is enchantingly simple-minded. One may be allowed to think, in spite of Madame de Staël's assertion to the contrary, that she was really disappointed at not being able to make some of her desiant retorts to the conqueror ; but it was child-like of her to have arranged them in advance !

Napoleon was preparing to invade Switzerland. Madame de Staël flattered herself for a moment that she might deter him from the project, and sought an interview with him for that purpose. The *tête-à-tête* lasted an hour, and Napoleon listened with the utmost patience, but he did not give himself any trouble to discuss Madame de Staël's arguments, and quickly diverted the conversation to his own love of solitude, country life, and fine arts— three things for which, by the way, his visitor cared almost as little as himself. She came away convinced that the eloquence of Cicero and Demosthenes combined would not move him, but captivated, she admits, by the charm of his manner ; in other words, by the false *bonhomie* which he possessed the art of introducing into his Italian garrulity. While Madame de Staël pleaded, and Bonaparte chattered, they were both learning to understand one another, but it is most probable that the first to be enlightened was the man.

Switzerland being threatened with an invasion, Madame de Staël left Paris in 1798 to join her father at Coppet ; for he was still on the list of *émigrés*, and

therefore came under a law which forbade him on pain of death to remain on any soil occupied by French troops. His daughter, always as much alarmed by remote danger as courageous when in imminent peril, trembled for his safety, and supplicated him to leave, but in vain. He probably supposed that her fears were groundless; and so they turned out to be.

When Madame de Staël was returning to France, Necker, anxious to have his name erased from the list of the proscribed, drew up a memorial to that effect, which was presented by his daughter to the Government. His request having been unanimously granted, his next step was to endeavour to recover the two millions which he had quixotically left in the public treasury when quitting France on the outbreak of the Revolution. The Government recognised the debt, and offered to pay it out of the confiscated church lands. But to this M. Necker would not consent. He no longer disapproved of the sale of ecclesiastical property, but he did not wish to throw doubt on his perfect impartiality by confounding his interests with his opinions.

About this time Madame de Staël's separation from her husband took place. Her ostensible object was to ensure the safety of her children's fortune, which was jeopardised by Baron de Staël's extravagance. Any other reason which may have existed is not of great importance, inasmuch as the Baron, always a shadowy personage, had finally been quite eclipsed by his brilliant wife. He was said to be indifferent to her, but he seems to have been always fairly amiable and very obedient. As it will not be necessary to speak of him again, it may be mentioned here that he died in 1802, and that his last moments were soothed by the

ministrations of his wife, who, hearing that he was ill, travelled from Switzerland to France to attend on him, and tried to bring him back with her to Coppet; but he expired on the road at a place called Poligny.

Madame de Staël happened to be returning from Coppet to Paris on the 18th Brumaire, when she learnt that her carriage had passed that of her former ally Barras, who was returning to his estate at Grosbois accompanied by gendarmes. The name of "Bonaparte" was on everybody's lips—the first time, as she remarks, that such a thing had happened since the Revolution. The state of things which she found on entering the capital was of a kind to excite her imagination. Five weeks of intrigue had ripened Napoleon's opportunity, and the 19th Brumaire dawned on a France exhausted and enslaved.

From that moment Madame de Staël's rôle was marked out for her irrevocably as one of perpetual opposition. At no time inclined to silence, she was, we may be sure, both loud and intrepid in her denunciation of the new tyranny. At first Napoleon appeared disposed to win her over. Joseph Bonaparte, who was her friend and frequented her salon, came to her once with something that sounded like a message. Napoleon had asked why Madame de Staël would not give in her adhesion to his Government? Did she want the two millions to be paid to her father, or residence in Paris accorded him? There should be no difficulty about either. She had only to say what it was she wanted. Madame de Staël's answer is celebrated: "The question is not what I want, but what I think."

Some protests against the growing despotism proceeded from the Tribunat, and notably from Constant.

It is superfluous to say that Madame de Staël applauded these with fervour. It is well-known how, the evening previous to a celebrated speech which he was about to make, Constant consulted her on the subject. She encouraged him warmly, although already perceiving that the path which she had elected to tread would, in all likelihood, lead to exile. The salon was full of her friends at the time, but Constant warned her that, if he spoke the next day, everybody would desert her. "You must obey your conscience," she replied; but adds that, had she known what she would have to suffer from that day, and throughout the next ten years, her answer might have been different. But here we think that Madame de Staël's literary instinct carried her away. She was very sincere, but very imaginative, and, when writing for the public, it must often have been difficult for her to distinguish between what she felt *before* and *after* the fact. Considering what her disposition was, and the opportunities for eloquence afforded both to herself and Constant by an attitude of hostility to Napoleon, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that she enjoyed her opposition with one half of her nature, if she regretted its results with the other.

For some weeks after Constant's speech Madame de Staël's salon, usually so animated, was silent and deserted. Joseph Bonaparte was forbidden by his brother to attend it; but most people needed no prohibition, they absented themselves of their own accord under various pretexts. Fouché, the Minister of Police, called on her, and insinuated that a brief retirement into the country would be advisable as giving the storm time to blow over. She took the hint, and retired for a short time to St. Ouen. On her

return to Paris she avers that she did not find Napoleon's wrath at all appeased. Apparently she expected it to die a spontaneous death, for she did not adopt the only means by which she could have pacified him, but continued to applaud, if not instigate, an active hostility to his measures. It would have been grand and magnanimous of Napoleon to have despised the enmity of a woman, but he was neither grand nor magnanimous. Moreover, the last thing which Madame de Staél probably desired was to be despised. Nobody can deny her the meed of admiration which she deserved for her love of liberty, and the indomitable spirit with which, when in exile, she refused to conciliate her oppressor by one word of praise. But, inasmuch as she knew with whom she had to deal, and what would be the consequence of her actions, one must admit that the amount of pity which she claimed for herself, and has generally received, is excessive. She was in direct contradiction to her own theories of a woman's true duty, when interfering in politics; and in being treated by Napoleon as a man might have been, she paid the penalty of the splendid intellect which emancipated her from the habits and the views, if not from the weaknesses, of her sex. She was neither helpless nor harmless, since she could stir up enemies to the tyrant by her eloquence, and revenge herself, when punished, by the power of her pen. She was exiled not because she was a woman and defenceless, but because she was a genius and formidable. She deliberately engaged in a contest of which the object was to prove who was the stronger—herself or Napoleon.

She came out of it scarred, but dauntless. What right had she to complain because the weapons that wounded her were keen?

Besides, paltry as Napoleon showed himself in many respects, he was a phenomenon of so exceptional a nature that to judge him by ordinary standards was absurd. It was the weakness of France which made his opportunity ; and if the epoch had not been abnormal, he never could have dominated it. The people whom he governed had two courses open to them : to submit or to protest. The first brought profit, the second glory ; and the glory which is purchased by no sacrifice is unworthy of the name.

In 1801 Madame de Staël published her work on *Literature*, in which, as she says, there was not a word concerning Napoleon, although "the most liberal sentiments were expressed in it with force." The book produced an immense sensation ; and Parisian society, in its admiration for the writer, forgot the First Consul's displeasure, and again crowded round her. She admits that the winter of 1801 was a pleasant one. Napoleon, passing through Switzerland the previous summer, had seen and spoken with M. Necker. It is characteristic of both interlocutors that the ex-statesman was far more impressed with the warrior than the latter with him. Necker divined in the young hero a strength of will to which his own hesitating nature was a stranger ; while Napoleon, on his side, penetrating but prejudiced, contemptuously described the once august financier in two words, "A banker and an Idealist." With his usual cynicism, he attributed Necker's visit to the desire of employment ; whereas Madame de Staël affirmed that her father's chief object was to plead her cause. In this he was so far successful that residence in France was for some time at least assured to her. "It was," she writes, "the last time that my father's protecting hand

was extended over my life." For the moment, either this beneficent influence, or, as is more likely, a passing fit of good humour on the part of Napoleon, enabled her to enjoy existence. Fouché consented to recall several *émigrés* for whom she interceded, and even Joseph Bonaparte once again treated her with cordiality, and entertained her for a little time at his estate at Mornfontaine.

A variety of circumstances arose to put an end to this state of things and to revive Napoleon's dislike to Madame de Staël. Her father published his work, *Dernières Vues de Politique et de Finance*, with the avowed intention of protesting against Napoleon's growing tyranny. His daughter had encouraged him in this feeling, herself unable, as she declares, to silence this "Song of the Swan." Then Bernadotte had inaugurated a certain sullen opposition to the First Consul, and Madame de Staël immediately became his friend. Finally, her salon was more crowded than ever, and by great personages, such as the Prince of Orange and other embryo potentates, besides foreigners of celebrity in letters and science.

Napoleon detested salons. It was his conviction that a woman who disposed of social influence might do anything in France, ipasmuch as he held that the best brains in the country were female. Madame de Staël, moreover, possessed the art of keeping herself well before the public. Even now she had just published *Delphine*, and all the papers were full of it. To please Napoleon, they condemned it as immoral—a strange criticism in that age, and an excellent advertisement in any.

Napoleon, on Madame de Staël's again visiting Switzerland, hinted to Lebrun that she would do well not

to return to Paris. His obsequious colleague hastened to intimate this by letter ; and although the communication was not official, the First Consul's lightest intimations by this time carried so much weight, that Madame de Staël was compelled to obey. She did so very reluctantly ; and, perhaps, if her father's prudence had not been greater than her own, her longing to be back in the capital would have overpowered every other consideration. As it was, she made the best that she could of a year's uninterrupted sojourn at Coppet. The Tribunat meanwhile had shown itself again rebellious. Bonaparte, irritated, declared that he would shake twelve or fifteen of its members " from his clothes like vermin," and Constant had no choice but to rejoin his friend in Switzerland.

## CHAPTER IX.

## NEW FACES AT COPPET.

SOME remarkable people had already begun to cluster round the Châtelaine of Coppet. De Gérando, Sismondi, Camille Jordan, Madame de Krüdener, Madame Récamier—all are interesting names. Camille Jordan, who was introduced by De Gérando, appears to have been taken up at once with characteristic ardour by Madame de Staël. His *Vrai Sens du Vote National sur le Consulat à Vie*, published in 1802, was just the kind of trumpet-call to which she always responded. Straightway her letters to him became frequent, and full of the excessive fervour and flattery which distinguished all her protestations of affection. Oddly enough, Madame de Krüdener, not yet a priestess, but a most decided coquette, appears to have exercised a rather perturbing influence upon these new relations. Madame de Staël writes that she would have liked to send Jordan a ring containing a lock of her hair, and formerly the property of her husband; but she is restrained by the recollection of Madame de Krüdener's fair tresses, for which, as she learns, Camille entertains a lively admiration. Another letter

contains an invitation to him to join her and one or two other friends in a journey to Italy, coupled with a playful hint that in such scenes he might find her society more agreeable than the lovely blonde's. Camille not responding in the way desired, Madame de Staël betrays some wounded feeling. She had thought that when once she had admired Jordan's writings so much, everything must be in harmony between them. She had been mistaken. She would take refuge in silence. Nevertheless she is not silent; and Madame de Krüdenor's name reappears. Madame de Staël is willing to admit that she is a remarkable person, but objects that she is always talking of persons who have killed themselves for love of her. Then Jordan is summoned to say if it be true that he is in love, not with Madame, but with Mademoiselle de Krüdener? She has nothing but a Greuze-like face to recommend her, and if she has enthralled him then why has he not fallen a victim to every young girl of fifteen? Nevertheless, if he really be in love, and will confess it, Madame de Staël will set herself to study Mademoiselle de Krüdener better, with a view to loving her herself if she prove indeed worthy of Jordan's affection.

In reading all this, one is forced to the conclusion that a more emotional woman than Madame de Staël never trod the earth. Every human creature, perhaps, has one unsolved—it may be insoluble riddle in his life—one mystery of feeling which nobody fathoms. More especially is this true of women who live so much in sentiment; and supremely true of a woman like Madame de Staël. That ineffable something in her which nobody seems to have guessed while she was living, of which Byron felt the presence in her

without divining the cause, was the passionate and unappeasable desire to be loved. All men who had dealings with her appear to have misunderstood her in so far that they believed her to be more dominated by her head than her heart—instead of understanding that, in her, head and heart were the systole and diastole of a temperament surprisingly forcible but not essentially strong. Or, if they did learn to comprehend her better at last, it was when she was no longer young, and feeling of a certain sort had become, alas! ridiculous. As long as she was entitled to feel and to suffer they made almost a reproach to her of the intellectual superiority which they could not deny, and cast her back upon her own thoughts for happiness.

Madame de Krüdener, on one occasion, arrived at the complacent conclusion that Madame de Staël was jealous of her. Not jealous of her beauty and golden locks, which was conceivable, and might have been true, but jealous of her literary fame ! *Corinne* jealous of *Valerie* ! It is true that *Corinne* had not yet seen the light, while *Valerie* had not only appeared, but had met with great success. So great an authority as St. Beuve pronounces Madame de Krüdener's novel to be a thing of joy, a work to be read thrice, “in youth, in middle life, and in old age.” But it is possible to have many intellectual qualities, and yet remain at such an immeasurable distance beneath Madame de Staël that nothing but vanity could scale the height.

Moreover, Madame de Krüdener's meaner self had not been a stranger to the immediate and surprising triumph of her work. She was always intriguing, and intrigued to some purpose when her novel was

on the eve of publication. She ran about to all the *fournisseurs* in Paris, asking them for bows *à la Valérie*, caps and gowns *d la Valérie*.

They heard the name for the first time; but naturally proceeded to call a variety of articles by an appellation presumably so fashionable, and the success of the novel was assured. Madame de Krüdener, promptly and conveniently oblivious of the sources of this sudden triumph, allowed herself to become somewhat intoxicated by it, and wrote to a friend that the "dear woman" (meaning Madame de Staël) was jealous of her. The person at whom this accusation was levelled probably never heard of it. She certainly would never have divined it; and, the little difficulty about Jordan once overcome, she appears to have found Madame de Krudener's society more than tolerable. Indeed they ended by becoming affectionate friends; but that was after the authoress of *Valerie* had undergone the mystic change which transformed her from a flirt into a priestess.

She had always been immensely admired, and had not preserved a spotless reputation. But she had one of those emotional natures in which a restless vanity, love of novelty, a morbid sensibility and an excess of imagination, combine to produce religious fervours.

Standing at a window in Riga one day, she saw an old admirer drop dead at the very moment that he was lifting his hat to salute her. This event made on her one of those terrifying and ineffaceable impressions which in regenerate circles is known as "a call." She plunged into mysticism; became the exponent of a new dogma, and finally claimed for herself the gift of prophecy. People were, of course, not wanting to declare that her predictions had in several instances

been verified; and, her personal fascination remaining always great, she now acquired an enormous influence. Her extreme self-abnegation and boundless charities increased her reputation for sanctity, and she even succeeded in bringing down on herself a satisfactory amount of persecution. In Paris superstition was, as always, rife. The days were not yet so remote when Philip Egalité had gone to question the devil in the quarries of Montrouge; and men were barely more than middle-aged who in their first youth had looked on the brazen brow of Cagliostro, and felt their blood agreeably frozen by the Comte de St. Germain's casual mention of personal experiences three hundred years old. But little more than thirty years previously to Madame de Kruidener's "revival" Mesmer had seen numbers of the fairest and many not of the stupidest heads in Paris gathered round his famous *baquet*. A little later the *illuminati* had been credited unveraciously and to their scant honour, with a share in the sanguinary priesthood of Robespierre, and finally Mademoiselle Lenormand had shuffled the cards of prophecy at the instance of Napoleon himself. Into this strange world, so exhausted and cynical, yet excited, impulsive, and thirsting for novel emotions, the Northern Sybil, with her strange, pale face and shining eyes, came like a wandering star.

But all this was subsequent to our first meeting with her at Coppet, when she was still fairly young, and singularly pretty, and the gold in her tresses owed as yet no fancied splendour to the aureole of inspiration.

Madame Récamier, the charming Juliette, was a far more normal, but a not less attractive person. Châteaubriand's memoirs have made her famous, but

he was among the latest of her many swains. Her path through life was strewn with conquests ; and she had offers of marriage by the score. They continued up to the age of fifty-one, when the author of *Réné* laid a heart which was hardly worthy of her at her feet.

Three generations of Montmorencys adored her ; a German prince of royal blood urged her to divorce her husband in order to marry him ; and Lucian Bonaparte was among the most ardent of her slaves. Ampère the younger, at twenty, fell in love with her, she being then forty-three ; and Châteaubriand addressed her as “*très belle et très charmante*” when she was seventy and blind. The little Savoyards turned round in the streets to look at her ; and when they did so no longer she knew that her marvellous beauty was on the wane. But, the fascination of her grace, her goodness, her unfailing tact and delicate intelligence, survived her loveliness ; and the men who knew her still worshipped her for years after fresher charms had attracted the eyes of the multitude. She was not a politician, but her friendship with Madame de Staël gave her decided opinions ; and she incurred the anger of Napoleon by declining to be *Dame du Palais* to one of his sisters. It was said, however, that what specially raised his ire was that a throng which on one occasion had been assembled to do homage to him, so far forgot his presence, when Madame Récamier appeared, as to have eyes only for her.

Finally Constant, the inexplicable, unhappy, brilliant Constant, sought the peace which he had never found in anyone in a tardy passion for her. He sought in vain, for she treated him as she treated all men, with a kind and gracious indifference which her

unique fascination robbed of all its sting. She influenced his political conduct—not altogether for good, as it turned out in 1814, when Napoleon returned from Elba. Vague hints at a rivalry before this date between her and Madame de Staël are to be found in some of the correspondence of the time; but they are contradicted by the tone of Madame de Staël's letters to her *belle Juliette*; and by Madame Récamier's own rare discretion.

Moreover, although Constant first saw Madame Récamier at Coppet in 1806, and confided to her those grievances of his against Madame de Staël, which just then were rising to exasperation point, it was only in 1813, when she called upon him to defend the interests of Murat at the Congress of Vienna, that he fell in love with her. The correspondence which ensued between them does more honour to her than to him. Leaving aside the questionable nature of his passion, he allowed himself to speak of Madame de Staël with a fractious mistrust which, even if transitory, could have come from nobody with a more deplorable grace. The basis of the sentiment appears to have been jealousy of Madame de Staël's influence over her devoted friend. Such a jealousy was as futile as paltry; for it would have needed a more witching tongue even than Constant's to have shaken the loyalty of the loving Juliette. To gratify a request of hers he wrote some fragments of memoirs and sketched a portrait of Madame de Staël which, besides much praise, contains some furtive sarcasm at her inexpugnable belief in herself—that large quality, too grand to be called conceit, which, according to Constant, amounted to a cultus and inspired a “religious respect.”

It is interesting to record that the first time Châteaubriand ever saw Madame Récamier was at Madame de Staël's. He had gone to thank the latter for having occupied herself about his recall to France. He found her at her toilette, talking eagerly, and twirling in her fingers, as usual, a little green twig. Madame Récamier suddenly entered, dressed in white. From that moment Châteaubriand was so absorbed in her, that he had no longer any attention to bestow on her eloquent friend. This was in 1800. He did not see her again for twelve years. Benjamin Constant, in the "portrait" already mentioned, has left an account of Madame Récamier and Madame de Staël, which gives a very good idea of both of them, and is specially interesting as coming from such a source. He relates that, at the first interview between them Madame Récamier felt very shy. He says:—

Madame de Staël's appearance has been much discussed, but a magnificent glance, a sweet smile, and an habitual expression of kindness, the absence of all minute affectation and of all embarrassing reserve, flattering words, praise a little direct but apparently dictated by enthusiasm, an inexhaustible variety in conversation, astonish, attract, and reconcile almost everybody who approaches her. I know no woman, and even no man, who is more convinced of her immense superiority over the whole world, and who renders this conviction less oppressive to others. Nothing could be more charming than the conversations between Madame de Staël and Madame Récamier. The rapidity of the one in expressing a thousand new thoughts, the rapidity of the second in seizing and judging them; on the one side a strong and masculine intelligence which unmasks everything, on the other a delicate and penetrating mind which understood everything. All this formed a whole impossible to render for those who did not enjoy the privilege of witnessing it.

Madame de Staël scattered golden rain of the frankest and sincerest praise over Madame Récamier every time that she addressed her. "You are exqui-

site," "you are beautiful," "you reign as a queen over sentiment," are among the sentences that stud every other line of her letters. Another of her female friends was she whom she named the "sweet Annette de Gérando," the wife of the author of *The Signs and Art of Thinking in their Mutual Relations, the Origin of Human Intelligence, the Comparative History of Philosophic Systems, &c.* He was a philanthropist as well as a philosopher, and Madame de Staël in later years once made rather a bitter allusion to this fact. As time went on, and Napoleon's star blazed brighter, De Gérando was unable to resist the general infection of idolatry; moreover, he had accepted a post under the new Government, and the withering blight of officialism fell to a certain extent on his spirit. "There is too much philanthropy in his friendship," wrote Madame de Staël to Jordan. "One is afraid of being treated by him like a pauper."

But in the summer of 1801 all this was still in the future, and harmony and wit reigned at Coppet. Sismondi about this time appears on the scene; discreet, observant, serene, reasonable, he conceived for Madame de Staël a friendship which remained moderate in expression and sincere in feeling to the last. He was not as much dazzled by her as many, and saw her failings clearly. Occasionally she even wounded his quiet self-love, and once or twice, when very restless and excited, she offended him. But he was invariably drawn back to her by the spell of her goodness. He appears as a rock of strength amid all the sparkling, moving, changing tide of ideas and feelings that rippled, dashed, recoiled, and returned unceasingly in every hour of the sojourn at Coppet. His steady sense and calm judgment bring out into

sharper contrast the unrest of Constant; the flashing splendour of Madame de Staël; the dreamy refinement of Mathieu de Montmorency; the fantastic charm of Madame de Krüdener, and the unfailing grace of the lovely "Juliette."

Bonstetten was yet another visitor at the château. He was called the Swiss Voltaire, was eternally young, and even grew younger and more plastic in mind as the unnoticed years crept over him. He had seen Madame Necker in Paris when she was still unmarried, and reappeared in her daughter's home at Coppet as gay, as smiling, as vivacious, and witty, as he had shown himself in the long-vanished salon of Madame de Vermenoux. He laid himself at Madame de Staël's feet at once, was received by her with her usual gracious warmth, and profited by her keen but generous criticism of his works. Everybody began by gently laughing at Bonstetten's incurable youthfulness, and ended by adoring him for it. He wanted steadiness of intellectual purpose—a "belfry," as St. Beuve expresses it; in other words, some central fact of mind round which all his ideas could rally—but he had plenty of insight, and, amid the universal eulogium of Madame de Staël's powers, seems to have been the first to point out a defect in her which Schiller commented on later. For when writing of her to Frederica Brun, he says: "Her goodness is extreme, and nobody has more intellect; but that which is best in you, in her does not exist. She lacks feeling for art, and sees no beauty except in eloquence and intelligence. She has more practical wisdom than anybody, but uses it more for her friends than herself."

Frederica Brun herself came to Geneva about this time, and has left enthusiastic descriptions of Madame

de Staël, of Necker, Madame Necker de Saussure and Madame Rilliet-Hüber. She also bore testimony to Madame de Staël's devotion to her children. Her eldest son, Auguste, and her only daughter, Albertine, were destined all her life to solace her by their love for much that she suffered. She directed the education of both her boys, but occupied herself especially with that of the girl. She was accused by some of her friends, even by Sismondi, of not caring very much for her children; but no word of theirs ever betrayed any sense of such a deficiency in her. On the contrary, both Auguste and Albertine always spoke and wrote of her with the utmost enthusiasm.

After spending two summers and one winter uninterruptedly at Coppet, during which period she wrote and published *Delphine*, the desire to return to France grew into an overpowering force. Napoleon had now been declared Consul for life, and was preparing to invade England. She hoped, she said, that amid such multifarious occupations he would not have leisure to conceive any objection against her establishing herself within a few miles of Paris, near enough, in fact, to enjoy the society of such friends as would not be too much in awe of the potentate to pay her occasional visits. She further deluded herself with the notion that Napoleon would shrink from the odium of exiling a woman so well-known as herself. Such a hope shows how simple Madame de Staël could still be at times. Napoleon was no longer in a position in which blame for mere details of conduct could touch him, and his career from this moment was to be one long outrage on public opinion.

Madame de Staël established herself in a country house about ten miles from Paris. Then there hap-

pènèd a circumstance which she had not foreseen. In the eighteen months of her sojourn at Coppet, the society which she knew formerly had grown baser. A whole race of parasites had arisen, whose real or fancied interest it was to obtain the favour of Napoleon by denouncing the people whom he detested. A woman, whose name is suppressed, lost no time in informing Napoleon that the road leading to Madame de Staël's dwelling was crowded with her visitors. Immediately one of her friends warned her that a gendarme would probably be sent to her without loss of time. She instantly became a prey to anxiety, an excessive anxiety it is certain, for she was excessive in most things.

She wrote to De Gérando to plead her cause with Talleyrand; she solicited the good offices of Lucian and Joseph Bonaparte; and finally she wrote a passionate but dignified letter to Napoleon himself. Then she waited, in the midst of strangers, and consuming herself with a fiery impatience that made every hour of fresh suspense a torture. She spent the nights sitting up with her maid, listening for the tramp of the horse which was to bring the gendarme and his message. But the gendarme did not arrive; and, worn out with her terrors, Madame de Staël bethought herself of her "beautiful Juliette." That loving and devoted person assured her of a kind welcome at St. Brice, a place about two leagues from Paris. Thither Madame de Staël went, and, finding there a varied and agreeable society, was for the time being cured of her fears. Hearing nothing more about her exile, she persuaded herself that Napoleon had changed his mind; and she returned with some friends to her own lodgings at Maffliers. It is probable enough that some officious courtier again drew her enemy's attention to

her; or perhaps Madame de Staël's own letter, in which she spoke of her children's education and her father's advanced age, and betrayed in every line her haunting fear of exile, enlightened Napoleon as to the tenderest spot in which to wound her. Disliking her as he did, and irritated by the mere thought of her as he seems to have been, it would have been highly characteristic of his southern malice to be decided in his course by the very prayers that should have deterred him.

However that may be, she was sitting at table with her friends one late September afternoon when she perceived a rider, dressed in grey, pull up at her gate and ring the bell. This prosaic-looking individual was the messenger of destiny. She felt it at once, although he did not wear the dreaded uniform. He was the bearer of a letter signed by Napoleon, and ordering her to depart within twenty-four hours for any place not nearer than forty leagues to Paris.

Needless to say, Madame de Staël did not submit without protest; and represented so energetically to the gendarme that a woman and three children could not be hurried off with no more preparation than a recruit's, as to induce him to allow her three days at Paris in which to get ready.

On their way they stopped for a few moments at Madame Récamier's, and there found General Junot, who, like everybody else, was one of Juliette's admirers. Perhaps to please the latter, he promised to intercede with the despot for her illustrious friend; and he was, as it appears, so far successful that Napoleon accorded permission for Madame de Staël to reside at Dijon. As soon as Madame Récamier received this news she communicated it in a letter to

the care of Camille Jordan. But Madame de Staël never received it, having been driven, as she says, by daily admonitions from her gendarme—but as Madame Récamier appeared to think, 'by her own impatient agitation—away from Paris' to Morfontaine. This was the home of Joseph Bonaparte. Probably pitying her state of excitement and misery, he invited her thither to spend a few days. He was just then animated, as far as he dared be, by a spirit of opposition to his mighty brother; and perhaps—who knows?—was kind to Madame de Staël as much for that reason as for any other. In any case, nobody in those days appears to have been profoundly in earnest except Madame de Staël herself. She could not recover either patience or peace. She was wretched at Morfontaine, in spite of the kindness of her host and hostess, because surrounded with officers of the Government who had accepted the servitude against which she rebelled. She knew that her father would receive her, but the thought of taking refuge at Coppet again was distasteful to her.

She had but just left that place, and to return thither was to resume habits of which she had tired, and to acknowledge herself beaten. Probably she longed for a change; and probably enough, also, she was in that morbid condition of mind in which to do the simplest and most obvious thing is to rob grief of all its luxury. Finally, she decided to crave permission through Joseph to betake herself to Germany, with the distinct assurance that the French Minister there would consider her a foreigner, and leave her in peace. Joseph hastened to St. Cloud for the purpose, and Madame de Staël retired to an inn within two leagues of Paris, there to await his reply.

At the end of one day, receiving no answer, and fearing (but why?) to attract attention to herself by remaining any longer in one inn, she sought the shelter of another; and is extremely—one cannot really help thinking needlessly—eloquent in describing her anguish during these self-imposed peregrinations. At last Joseph's letter came. He not only forwarded her the permission to go to Berlin, but added several valuable letters of introduction, and took leave of her in the kindest terms.

Accompanied by her children and Benjamin Constant, she started, hating the postillions for their boasted speed, and feeling that every step taken by the horses was a fresh link in the ever-lengthening and indestructible chain of which one end was Paris and the other her heart.

What Constant's feelings were she does not say, and speaks of his accompanying her as a spontaneous act of friendship. But he had been exiled as well as herself; and although his desire to go to Germany had partly determined hers, and neither wished to separate from the other, there are indications that Constant quitted France as reluctantly as his companion.

Their relations were already varied by alternate periods of shine and storm; and although her influence over him was still immense, it had begun, as was inevitable with such a man, to fret him. And probably some doubts that were not political, and some sufferings that had their root in another cause than exile, played their part in the extreme agitation of Madame de Staël's mind at this period.

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## CHAPTER X.

## MADAME DE STAËL VISITS GERMANY.

AT Metz Madame de Staël was received in triumph. The Prefect of the Moselle entertained her; parties were given in her honour; and all the literary big-wigs of the place hastened to do her homage. She there, for the first time, came into personal contact with Charles de Villers, with whom she had previously corresponded on the subject of Kant. Of course she was charmed with him, her first impulse invariably being to find every clever, or distinguished person delightful. Her friendship with him resembled all her friendships. She began by expecting to have inspired as much enthusiasm as she felt, possibly a little more, seeing that she was a woman, and such a woman, and exiled to boot. Villers, a cross-grained kind of Teuton, had no idea of allowing his theories, which were extremely sturdy on all subjects, to be spirited away by any of Madame de Staël's conversational conjuring tricks. They discussed philosophy, and he railed sourly at French taste; and, perhaps by way of proving his final emancipation from all such

fetters, he had obtained the companionship of a certain Madame de Rodde, whom Madame de Staël described, with some asperity, as a "fat German."

But she separated from the philosopher still quite charmed with his appreciation of the good and true, and not in the least repulsed by his ways. On the contrary, she wrote to him shortly afterwards, reproaching him passionately with his silence. One can imagine how absurd such exactions must have seemed to the good Villers, with his head full of Kant and Madame de Rodde to attend to his comforts; but the truth was that Madame de Staël's mood just then caused her to make herself needlessly miserable about everything. To Mathieu de Montmorency she wrote that she was filled with terror, and fancied that death must shortly overtake her father, children, friends, everybody dear to her.

She seemed to forget entirely that it was her own choice which had taken her to Germany; Napoleon had banished her merely from Paris; and there was nothing to prevent her returning to Coppet to soothe the last years and enjoy the conversation of her venerated father. But this did not suit her; she required a wider intellectual horizon and more varied society.

For many reasons, some of them dependent on the political bias of monarchical writers, it has been the fashion to proclaim Madame de Staël's opposition to Napoleon as inspired by pure hatred of despotism. To us this does not seem quite a correct version. If it were, Madame de Staël would have been a totally different person; colder, less impulsively benevolent, less thoroughly womanly. All through her life her conduct was determined by her feeling towards indi-

viduals. While professing republicanism she counted, as we have seen, hosts of reactionary friends; the claims to consideration of noble names and social distinctions weighed powerfully with her; and all her love of liberty could not save her from being torn by sympathy for every Royalist head that fell during the Revolution. Such a catholicity of feeling constitutes a charming woman, but not a great politician; and Madame De Staël's liberal instincts and penetrating insight only lent force to her hatred of Napoleon, they did not originate it. There was a natural antagonism between their natures—circumstances increased this, and obstinacy on both sides confirmed it—and Madame de Staël made the most of a persecution which, while condemning her to inaction, added enormously to her fame.

That Napoleon in his most transcendent moments was great simply by stupendous intellect and amazing will; that in his baser moments he was inconceivably callous, cynical, arrogant, and mean, perhaps few persons in these days will be found to deny. But it is over-stating the case to assert, as has been done, that he persecuted Madame de Staël from unmitigated envy of her superiority. Much as he resented intellectual power in a woman, it is nevertheless most likely that what really inspired his action against Madame de Staël was her turbulent disposition and the restless mind which made her the centre of Parisian opposition. As to this opposition itself, without any wish to detract from its sublimity, it may fairly be asked whether—at the time Constant began his denunciations, and Madame de Staël encouraged them—it was altogether well-timed. To declaim against Napoleon's growing despotism was perhaps irresistible to

independent spirits ; but such declamation necessarily remained sterile of results in the state in which France then was. What would these orators have substituted for the strong will of a Dictator. The greed for place of a Talleyrand ? The mystic fervour of a Montmorency ? The dissolute ambition of a Barras ? Between the sanguinary excesses of the *Terreur Rouge*, the lust for revenge of the *Terreur Blanche*, the incorrigible short-sightedness and criminal frivolity of the "Coblentz" faction, the diseased logic of the Jacobins, and the frightful collapse of intelligence, morality, decency, and humanity that extended from end to end of France, it is difficult to understand what ruler could have governed it for other ends than personal ones. Napoleon sprung armed from the ruin of France, as a kind of fatal embodiment of all the evil under which she groaned and all the crime that stained her. And yet who shall say that his career of conquest, desolating as it was, could have been spared from European history ? It enters as a factor into almost all that this closing century has brought us—the unity of Italy, the power of Germany, France's own awakening to the limitations of her destiny. It was not given to any mortal, eighty years ago, to foresee all this ; and Madame de Staël, who was in most things of a preternatural acuteness, only foresaw the coming despotism and its immediate, not its ultimate, results. Nevertheless, had her bias against Napoleon not been a personal one, she might have submitted more quietly to his first acts of tyranny, and only protested when his insatiable ambition had prostrated France at the feet of the nations. She might have done this, because she was constantly led away by her feelings, and could be blind

on occasion. That she was not more dazzled by Napoleon must be considered a lucky accident.

In Germany the feeling in regard to her was not generally favourable. The mightiest minds, indeed, admired her great intellect; and Goethe's unwilling homage is the brightest jewel in her crown. But it was as a woman that she excited a somewhat sour antipathy. Her plaintive little friend Madame de Beaumont had called her a *tourbillon*, and Heine has only added a doubtful picturesqueness to this description when designating her a "whirlwind in petticoats." But as a most disturbing element she certainly did introduce herself into German society. Rahel Varnhagen acidly—it is difficult to help thinking ungencrously—echoes the usual complaint of her obstreperousness, saying, with striking lack of originality, by the way, "She is nothing to me but an inconvenient hurricane."

Schiller, as is well known, was infinitely more magnanimous. He had made up his mind as to her kind of intellect before she came. In 1798 he had already pronounced her to be of an "exalted, reasoning, entirely unpoetical nature"; and although he clung, after seeing her, to his conviction that "of poetry she had no conception," he was obviously surprised and enchanted at her native goodness, her healthy simplicity of mind, and unaffectedness. To her penetration, brilliancy and vivacity, he does full justice. And if, as her book on Germany afterwards showed, his statement that "nothing existed for her unless her torch could illuminate it," was as misleading as are most metaphors, still its descriptiveness enables one exactly to understand the particular sort of splendour with which Madame de Staël flashed

through the windings of the German mind. Schiller—poor man!—was quite pathetic over her amazing volubility, which left him, with his halting French, a hopeless distance behind her. It is rather comic to trace the dismay at her exhausting personality which pierces through all his admiration for, and interest in, her mind. To Goethe, who was coqueting at Jena, and wished the brilliant stranger to come there to him, Schiller later writes : “I saw the De Staël yesterday, in my house, and again to-day at the Dowager Duchess’s. • One would be reminded of the sieve of the Danaïdes, if Oknos with his donkey did not then occur to one.” He fears she will have to discover that the Germans in Weimar can be fickle, as well as the French, unless it strikes her soon that it is time she went. To Körner he complained that the devil had brought the French female philosopher to torment him just in the middle of his new play.

He found her, of all mortals within his experience, “the most gesticulative, combative, and talkative,” even while admitting that she was almost the most cultivated and intellectual of women. But he declared that she destroyed all poetry in him, and waxed plaintive once again over his ineffectual struggles with French. He proclaimed that not to admire her for her fine mind and liberality of sentiment was impossible ; and he breathed a sigh of the most unfeigned relief when she departed. All the Court personages felt that they had been having a severe time of it ; although the bright and petulant Duchess Amelia was enchanted in the first instance, and wrote to Goethe imploring him to come and study the phenomenon. He resisted for a long while ; but finally arrived—not without a previous sneer or two. Madame de Staël

was charmed to know him—in fact, her days at Weimar passed in a perfect effervescence of delight. While the Germans were coldly, sometimes rather snarlingly criticising her, she was admiring them. Schiller she speaks of with the liveliest enthusiasm. Their acquaintance began with an animated discussion on the respective merits of French and foreign dramas. Madame de Staël maintained that Corneille and Racine were unsurpassable. Schiller, of course, differed; and managed to make her heed his reasons, in spite of his difficulty in speaking French. His quiet simplicity and earnestness, as well as his originality of mind, became instantly manifest to the illustrious stranger. With her, admiration meant always the most ungrudging friendship; and this was the sentiment with which Schiller inspired her for the rest of his days. Goethe she found cold, and she was characteristically disappointed at his no longer displaying the passionate ardour of Werther. "Time has rendered him a spectator," she says; yet she admits the universality of his mind and his prodigious information when once prevailed on to talk. It is provoking to think that she never saw the best of Goethe, and that this disappointing result was—although she was far, indeed, from guessing it—her own fault chiefly; for she informed the poet that she intended to print his conversation, and of this Goethe had a horror. He states as much in a letter to Schiller, and gives as his reason the sorry figure which Rousseau had cut in his correspondence—just then published—with Madame de la Tour Franqueville and her friend.

The Dowager Duchess Amelia was a vivacious, pleasure-loving, singularly intelligent, and liberal-minded woman, who had governed the duchy during her son's

minority admirably, and made allies for herself among the best German intellects. Thanks to her, her son Karl August had been so trained, that, in the midst of a court circle to which the light of the eighteenth century had barely penetrated, he showed a most manly contempt for the ideals of mistresses of the robes and silver sticks in waiting, and swept all such fripperies away to become the dearest friend of Goethe. His duchess (whose courage both extorted Napoleon's admiration and saved her husband from further proofs of his ire) was a woman of grand character, and as great a contrast, except in what was really best in both of them, to her lively mother-in-law as could well be imagined. She insisted on the most uncompromising observance of etiquette, and wore to the last day of her life the costume which had prevailed in the years when she was young.

Of this remarkable trio of exalted personages it was the reigning duchess whom Madame de Staël selected for her friend. Indeed, she never mentions the Dowager Duchess in corresponding with the daughter-in-law, and in her *Allemagne* dismisses the Grand Duke with a few lines, in which she alludes to his military talents and speaks of his conversation as *piquante* and thoughtful.

From Weimar, Madame de Staël went to Berlin, with letters from their highnesses of the little court to the lovely and charming Queen Louise.

In a well-known letter to the Grand Duchess (the first of their long correspondence), she records a *fête* which took place immediately after her arrival. It was a masquerade representing Alexander's return to Babylon; and the beautiful queen, of whom Madame de Staël is lost in admiration, danced in it herself.

To this pageant succeeded various costume quarrels, in which Kotzebue appeared as a priest of Mercury, poppy crowned, caduceus in hand, and so ugly and awkward, that Madame de Staël wonders why her imagination was not irretrievably ruined by the sight of him.

One likes to think of her at this court in the midst of such famous and distinguished people; the personages so outwardly brilliant, so inwardly dull, who surrounded her having vanished down the gulfs of Time, her own unique personality stands out vividly against the picturesque but confused background reconstructed by our fancy.

At Berlin she first saw and liked August Wilhelm Schlegel, destined later to be so unwelcome to Sismondi, Bonstetten, and her other friends at Coppet. She succumbed at once to the varied attractions of his colossal learning, his surprising linguistic accomplishments, and his great conversational powers. She felt that here was a foeman worthy of her steel, and she magnanimously overlooked his acerbity, his pedantry, and vanity. She had indeed a royal indifference to the defects of great minds. It was only the greatness she cared for.

Berlin was destined to be associated with the greatest, perhaps the most genuine, grief of her life. She left it pleased with her reception, enriched with new friends, new experiences, and new ideas. She had been happier there than six months previously she would have admitted she could ever be again. Far happier than at Coppet, which for years past had only been a place where she tarried and amused herself as she could until the moment came, for returning to Paris. She had treasured up a wealth of conversation

for her father—all kinds of novel and delightful impressions which she felt would be listened to by nobody so appreciatively as by him; and she started for Vienna, there to glean a little more. But she had hardly set foot in Austria when a courier brought her the news that her father was dangerously ill. He was, in truth, dead, and the messenger knew it; but the fact was withheld, to be broken to her later on. She instantly quitted Vienna, where, as she expresses it, "her happiness had ended," and started homewards. On the road her father's death was communicated to her. Her grief was overpowering and demonstrative to the last degree. It was not only sorrow that she felt, but an overmastering terror, for it seemed to her that with her father her last moral support had vanished. Henceforward, she would bend to the storms of life like a reed.

On arriving at Coppet, she sank into a condition that temporarily resembled dementia. The idea that in losing her father her whole existence was irretrievably wrecked from its moorings, and would drift aimlessly in the future, again filled her mind, and this time with greater force. To every remonstrance she only answered, "I have lost my father." She soon recovered—strangely soon as it seemed to many—her old elasticity and fire, but a curious secret change was wrought in her from the hour of her loss. She showed mystic yearnings, and became even a little superstitious. She invoked her father in her prayers, and nothing deeply agreeable to her ever happened without her saying, "My father has obtained this for me."

One of Necker's latest acts was to write a letter to Napoleon begging him to rescind the order for Madame de Staël's exile. Needless to say that the

pathetic request had no effect upon the person to whom it was addressed: Domestic sentiment at no time appealed strongly to Napoleon, and at this period he had almost reached his final pitch of unreasoning and arrogant egoism. The murder of the Duc d'Enghien had hardened all his nature, and in preparing to have himself proclaimed Emperor he had kicked away any useless rubbish in the shape of scruples that might still encumber him.

Now, when the first germ of decay had begun to consume the core of his splendour, his attitude towards Madame de Staël itself altered. His persecution of her ceased to be a capricious thing compounded of spasmodic spite on his side and sporadic fears on hers, and became an organised system of repression which placed its originator in a light all the meaner that the woman against whom it was directed rose from this time to a new and grander moral altitude.

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## CHAPTER XI.

MADAME DE STAËL AND AUGUSTE SCHLEGEL  
AT ROME.

MADAME DE STAËL sought to solace her grief for her father's death by writing "The Private Life of Necker," a short sketch intended to serve as preface to a volume of his fragmentary writings. Constant spoke very feelingly of this sketch, and pronounced it to be a revelation of all that was best in the writer's head and heart. He said that all her gifts of mind and feeling were here devoted to express and adorn a single sentiment, one for which she claimed the sympathy of the world.

This is all quite true, but it is natural that the sketch should affect us less than it did Madame de Staël's contemporaries. Necker was a good and intelligent man. He had varied talents of no common order, and an incorruptibility of character which would be rare—given the circumstances—in any age, and, by his admirers, was supposed to be especially so in his. But joined to all these qualities in him were just the feibles which spoil an image for posterity. He had a profound compassion for what he considered the hardships of his lot. It is touching to read the way—so simple, loving, and yet ingenuous—in which

Madame de Staël records such facts as the following :—  
“ It was painful to him to be old. His figure, which had grown very stout and made movement irksome to him, gave him a feeling of shyness that prevented his going into society. He hardly ever got into a carriage when anybody was looking at him, and he did not walk where he could be seen. In a word; his imagination loved grace and youth, and he would say to me sometimes, ‘ I do not know why I am humiliated by the infirmities of age, but I feel that it is so.’ And it was thanks to this sentiment that he was loved like a young man.”

For the rest, the sketch is one long impassioned elegy in prose. One is astonished at the sudden creative force of expression in it. It is graphic by mere power of words without any help from metaphor.

It was not in Madame de Staël’s nature to mourn in solitude, and we have Bonstetten’s authority for the fact that the summer of 1804 was one of the most delightful which he had ever passed at the Château. Schlegel, Constant, Sismondi, were all there, as well as Bonstetten, himself, and Madame Necker de Saussure, now more than ever devoted to her cousin. Madame de Staël had also a new visitor, Müller the historian, whose learning was stupendous, and who wrangled from morning till night on subjects of amazing erudition with Schlegel. The mistress of the house, although far from being the equal of the two combatants in learning, sometimes rushed between them with her fiery eloquence, like an angel with a flaming sword ; but most of the society were reduced to silence. Sismondi felt a perfect ignoramus, and talked plaintively to Bonstetten of going to Germany, there to drink in facts and theories at the source of the new

intellect. In short, the German "Revival" was beginning, and Madame de Staël in bringing Auguste Schlegel to Switzerland had broken a large piece off the mountain of learning, like somebody in the fairy tale who carried away a slice from the Island of Jewels.

In October 1804 Madame de Staël started with Schlegel and her three children for Italy, and it is to this journey that the world owes *Corinne*. It is said that Schlegel first taught Madame de Staël to appreciate art—that is, painting, sculpture, and architecture. For music she had always had a passion, and both sang and played agreeably. But plastic beauty had as yet been a sealed book to her, and she had not even any great appreciation of scenery. A spontaneous feeling for all these she perhaps never acquired. Ste. Beuve, indeed, complains that the spot on Misenum where she places Corinne on one occasion, was the least picturesque of many beautiful points of view. Nevertheless, Italy revived her. She found hope and thought and voice anew beneath that magic sky. There was nothing but the still-abiding sense of loss to mar the pleasure of her visit. The diplomatic agents of Napoleon abstained from interference with her, and Joseph had given her letters introducing her to all the best society in Rome. Unlike her own *Corinne*, however, she found it very uninteresting, and wrote complainingly to Bonstetten that Humboldt was her most congenial companion. The Roman princes she found extremely dull, and preferred the cardinals, as being more cultivated, or more probably more men of the world. For the rest, she was received with the liveliest respect, and even enthusiasm; was made a member of the Arcadian Academy, and had endless

sonnets written upon her. Unfortunately, her *Dix Années d'Exil* does not speak of this Italian journey, and so, for the impression she received, one has to turn to *Corinne*, where, of course, everything reappears more or less transfigured. One would have liked to know the genesis of that work, on what occasion it took root, and how it grew, in Madame de Staël's mind. How much did she really know of that poor, lampooned, insulted, and squint-eyed Corilla who was the origin of her enchanting Sibyl? How far below the surface did she really see of that strange Roman world, so cosmopolitan, so chaotic after the French invasion, so thrilled with fugitive novel ideas, so steeped in time-worn apathy? It would be delightful to know what was the impression which Madame de Staël herself produced in the few salons where a little culture prevailed, and what was the true notion concerning her in that motley and decaying society of belated Arcadians, exhausted *cicisbei* and *abatini* lapsed for ever from the genial circles where their youth had passed in gossiping and sonneteering.

Hers must have seemed a curious and forcible figure among all those frivolous "survivals"; and great and strange, mad and merry as were the many foreigners who found their way at various times to Rome, probably no more striking couple ever appeared there than Madame de Staël and Auguste Schlegel.

As soon as she returned to Switzerland she began *Corinne*. At Coppet some of her old circle immediately gathered round her again: Madame Necker de Saussure, of course, and Madame Rilliet-Huber, Schlegel, Constant, and Sismondi, assembled to enjoy her society once more. The private theatricals in which she delighted were again resumed, and such

tragedies as *Zaire* and *Phèdre* performed, as well as slight comedies composed by the châtelaine herself. Madame de Staël was fond of acting ; and although she had no special talent, her imposing presence, and the earnestness with which she played, made her performance a pleasing one—at any rate, to her admirers.

When *Corinne* was drawing to an end, its authoress could no longer resist her old and recurring temptation to return to France. She went first to Auxerre ; then, profiting by the indulgence of Fouché, who, when it was possible (and politic), always shut one eye, she accepted an invitation to Acosta, a property near Meulon belonging to Madame de Castellane. Some of her old friends ventured there to visit her, and in peace and reviving hope she completed *Corinne*. It was no sooner published than it was hailed with universal applause.

All this success annoyed Napoleon, possibly because it revealed in his enemy greater powers than he had hitherto suspected, hence a greater influence with all enlightened minds. According to some, an article which appeared in the *Moniteur* attacking *Corinne* was written by the Imperial hand. And this first sign of ire was followed by a new decree of banishment, which sent Madame de Staël back to Coppet. There a few new figures came to join the usual set, among them Prince Auguste of Prussia, who straightway fell a victim to Madame Récamier. For a few weeks this love affair introduced a new element of romantic, yet very human, interest into the intensely intellectual life of Coppet. The Prince wished Madame Récamier to marry him ; and for a short time, either dazzled by the prospect of such splendour, or really attracted by her royal wooer, she hesitated. But such a step would

have involved a divorce from M. Récamier. He was old, he had lately lost his fortune; he had always been good to her; and Juliette made up her mind that it would be too unkind to leave him.

Some other scenes not altogether literary were passing just then in the Château. The relations between Madame de Staël and Constant, of late much strained, had now become constantly stormy. Sismondi, some years later, in writing to the Countess of Albany, referred to them as really distressing, and apparently, Madame Récamier was in the flattering but uncomfortable position of having to listen to and, as well as she could, soothe both parties.

Constant would have married Madame de Staël, but she desired a secret marriage, and he would only hear of an open one. It was only in 1808 he finally put an end to his perplexities by marrying Charlotte von Hardenberg. He carefully avoided telling Madame de Staël of his intention beforehand, being still too much under her influence to bear her criticisms and possible reproaches with equanimity.

About November 1807 Madame de Staël had returned again to Germany, accompanied by two of her children, by Constant, Sismondi, and Schlegel. From Munich she wrote one of her characteristic letters to Madame Récamier:—

“ I have spent five days here, and I leave for Vienna in an hour. There I shall be thirty leagues farther from you and from all who are dear to me. All society here has received me in a charming manner, and has spoken of my beautiful friend with admiration. You have an aerial reputation which nothing common can touch. The bracelet you gave me [this bracelet contained Madame Récamier's portrait] has caused my

hand to be kissed rather oftener, and I send you all the homage which I receive."

In another she significantly remarks :—

"The Prince de Ligne is really amiable and good above all things. He has the manners of M. de Narbonne, and a heart. It is a pity he is old, but all that generation fill me with an invincible tenderness."

This is one of her touching allusions to her father, of whom all "good grey heads" reminded her. But the Prince de Ligne and Necker were two very different people. The former was the ideal of a *grand seigneur*, clever, brave, handsome, all in a supreme degree; the descendant of a chivalrous race, and as gallant and noble himself as any of them. He was extremely witty, and quickly achieved the conquest of the Empress Catherine when he was sent on a mission to Russia in 1782. He followed in her suite through the Crimea on the occasion of her famous journey there with Joseph II., and his amusing account of this expedition is one of his claims to literary reputation. The last years of his brilliant life were embittered by the loss of his property, consequent on the French invasion of Belgium, and by the death in battle of his eldest and best-beloved son.

Madame de Staël probably enjoyed his society all the more that the Viennese gentlemen appeared to her singularly uninteresting. She complained of them in her letters to the Grand Duchess of Weimar, and also to Madame Récamier, and declared that she felt the need of a summer at Coppet to indemnify her for the frivolous monotony of the Austrian capital. She seems to have been in an unusually depressed state of mind, and recurred perpetually to the hardships of exile.

In April 1808, shortly before starting again for

Weimar, she addressed a letter to her former friend, the ungrateful Talleyrand, begging him to interest himself for the payment of the two millions left by her father in the French Treasury. She alluded sadly, and at some length, to all her sufferings again in this letter, and reminded him that he wrote thirteen years previously to her from America, "If I must remain even one year longer here I shall die."

One is not much surprised to divine from subsequent circumstances that this appeal produced no effect. Amiable, and even pathetic as it was, Talleyrand was not the man to be moved by it. Like Napoleon, to whom he perhaps showed it, he would be likely to think that Madame de Staël's "exile" was singularly mitigated. It is one thing to be proscribed and banished, not only from one's own country but from friends and fortune; to wander, as so many illustrious refugees have done, a lonely stranger in a foreign land, not daring to invoke the protection of any authority, and constantly eking out a miserable existence by teaching or worse. It is another thing to be wealthy, influential, admired; to be the guest of sovereigns, and the honoured friend of the greatest minds in Europe; to be surrounded with sympathy, and followed at every step by the homage of a brilliant and cultured crowd. Such was the existence of Madame de Staël. Her sorrows were great because her fiery temperament rebelled against her grief, at the same time that her great intellect fed it with lofty and lyric thoughts. But her sorrows were of the affections exclusively. She never felt the sting of the world's scorn, nor knew the bitter days and sleepless nights of poverty. If she ever "ate her bread with tears," they were not those saltiest tears of all which are wrung from burning eyes

by unachieved hopes and frustrated endeavour. Every field of social and intellectual activity was open to her except the salons of Paris, and those were very different under the blight of Napoleonic bureaucracy from what they had been even during the mingled vulgarity and ferment of the Directory.

She returned to Weimar, and had a touching meeting with the Grand Duchess, whose recent troubles, and the courage she displayed under them, had not only endeared her to her subjects and her friends, but had won the applause of the world. On her way thither she presumably delayed a short while in Berlin, and it must have been to that period that Ticknor refers when relating a very amusing anecdote in his *Life and Letters*. She asked Fichte to give her in a quarter of an hour a summarised idea of his famous *Ego*, professing to be, as she doubtless was, entirely in the dark about it. Fichte's consternation may be imagined, for he had been all his life developing his system, and intended it to comprehend the universe. Moreover he spoke very bad French, and even if Madame de Staël were momentarily silent in speech, we may fancy how voluble she *looked*, and how nervous the prescience of her imminent rapid speech must have made the philosopher. However, he made up his mind to the attempt, and began. In a very few moments Madame de Staël burst out :

"Ah! that is enough. I understand perfectly. Your system is illustrated by a story in Munchausen's travels." Fichte's expression at this announcement was a study; but the lady went on: "He arrived once on the banks of a wide river, where there was neither bridge nor ferry, neither boat nor raft; and at first he was in despair. But an idea struck him, and taking

hold of his own sleeve, he jumped himself over to the other side. Now, Monsieur Fichte, is not this exactly what you have done with your *Ego*?"

This speech charmed everybody except Fichte himself, who never forgave Madame de Staël, or at least so Ticknor's informant said, and it is easy to believe him.

During the remainder of 1808, and the whole of 1809 and 1810, Madame de Staël remained alternately at Coppet and Geneva, working steadily at the *Allgemeine*. It was only about this time that she acquired habits of sustained occupation. Her father had entertained so strong and singular an objection to seeing her engaged in writing, that, rather than pain him, she used to scribble at odd hours and in casual positions—sometimes, for instance, standing by the chimney-piece. In this way she was able to hide her work as soon as he appeared, and thus spare him the annoyance of supposing that he had interrupted her. She talked so continually that it was a marvel how she ever wrote at all; and her friends used often to wonder where and how she planned her works. But the truth seems to have been that they sprang full grown from her brain, after having been unconsciously developed thereby perpetual discussion.

During the years above mentioned society at Coppet, although normally composed as of old by Schlegel, Sismondi, Constant (for a time), Madame Récamier, and Bonstetten, was varied once more by new and interesting visitors. Among these was Madame Le Brun, who not only painted a portrait of Madame de Staël, but noted many things which now afford pleasant glimpses of the life at the Château. Of course, like everybody else who sojourned as a guest at Coppet, she

fell under the spell of the hostess. Byron himself some years later recorded how much more charming Madame de Staël was in her own house than out of it ; and she seems to have possessed the art of dispensing her hospitality, which was royal, with as much grace as cordiality.

Among the new figures in these years at Coppet were Werner and Oehlenschläger. Both were poets and cursed with the irritability of the genus, so that their mutual exasperation was great, and Madame de Staël had some trouble to keep the peace between them. Sismondi in one of his letters described Werner as a man of many intellectual gifts, who considered himself the apostle of Love and bound to preach it in his wanderings through the world. Occasionally his utterances were a little puzzling to sober-minded people, who were too much taken aback by his mystical mixtures of passion, sentiment, and piety to be always ready with an answer.

Werner had had a *Sturm und Drang* period of extreme dissipation, had taken to Freemasonry, and imbibed, apparently, some of the ideas of the Illuminati ; and, besides his mysticism in religion, inclined to socialism in politics. After all this vagueness of thought, joined to a highly impressionable and very vivid temperament, it is not surprising to learn that he eventually became a Roman Catholic priest and rose to great renown as a preacher.

Oehlenschläger has left a spiteful picture of Werner, with his nose full of snuff, discussing his esoteric doctrines in an execrable patois which was intended for French. Both poets, however, united in admiring and praising, almost worshipping, Madame de Staël, and she on her side seems to have cared little for any

peculiarity in their habits as long as there was originality in their characters.

It was during this visit of the two poets at Coppet that Karl Ritter appeared for a short time on the scene. He enjoyed a great reputation in Germany, being considered as the inventor of the Science of Comparative Geography. He was also a gentle, earnest man, and became extremely religious in his old age. He records an animated, indeed perfervid and amazingly eloquent, speech pronounced before him by Madame de Staël in favour of the metaphysical origin of religion, and in answer to Sismondi who maintained that its basis should be reasoned morality. Madame de Staël declared that religion was the condition of virtue; and that without it there could be no higher life, by which she meant no communion with God. In support of this thesis she displayed the most surprising power both of analysis and illustration, while her logic appearing to Ritter unanswerable, caused the discussion, as he avers, to be anepoch in his intellectual life. This new interest of Madame de Staël in such questions was largely due to the ever-growing influence of Madame de Krüdener, now irrevocably "regenerate" and rapidly rising to fame as a priestess and prophetess, while leading a life of the utmost asceticism. She had been in Coppet again, and had left there the trail of her sacerdotal tendencies. Poor Bonstetten, daily growing younger in mind and heart, was comically disgusted at the change which was coming over the intellectual life of the Château. The confusion of dogmas prevailing could not console him for the fact of there being any dogmas at all. Between Catholics, Boehmists, Martinists, and Mystics, he appeared at times to be quite worn out, and attributed

the whole revolution to the influence of his pet aversion Schlegel. How he made this out is not very clear, for the theological spirit was as cosmopolitan in its representatives as varied in its forms. Mathieu de Montmorency was a Catholic, somebody else a Quietist, a third an Illuminist, while Rationalism was left to the doubtful prowess of Baron Voght, who was reported by Bonstetten to be as gyratory in his opinions as a weathercock.

We now approach an event in Madame de Staël's life so well known and so often recounted, that it will not be necessary to relate it again in detail. This was the suppression of her *Allemagne*, Napoleon's crowning act of meanness, and a deed which obtained for Madame de Staël the entire and unquestioning sympathy of every enlightened mind and generous heart.

Madame de Staël determined, after some hesitation, to publish the work in Paris, after submitting it in the first instance to the approval of the Imperial Censors. Why she took this unfortunate resolution it is difficult to conceive; for she had been plentifully illuminated with regard to Napoleon's spite, and even if all her penetration did not enable her to foresee the full lengths to which this would carry him, she might, one would think, have guessed that the censors in Paris would judge her work with the utmost severity.

However this may be, she took up her abode near Blois for the sake of correcting the proofs as they issued from the press. She had, before leaving Coppet, caused her passports to be made out for America, in which country she had property, and whither, for the sake of her children she said, she was gradually making up her mind to go. One cannot imagine Madame de Staël in the New World such as it was in

those days ; and as she entertained the project for a long while, put it off from month to month, and finally abandoned it altogether, it is more than probable that she never liked it sufficiently to have resolved upon it seriously.

At Blois she established herself first in the famous Château of Chaumont-sur-Loire, haunted by such various memories as the Cardinal d'Amboise, Diane de Poitiers, Catherine de Medici, and Nostradamus. But the owner of the house shortly returning, she removed to another mansion at Fossé, the home of a M. de Salaberry. She had addressed a letter to Napoleon in which she presented her work to his notice, craved an interview in very respectful terms, and urged on his notice the advantage which it would be for her sons' career and her daughter's eventual marriage (Albertine was then thirteen) if she were allowed to reside again in the neighbourhood of Paris.

While awaiting the answer to this, she gathered round her a group of her usual friends, among them Madame Récamier, Adrien and Mathieu de Montmorency, Prosper de Barante, and Benjamin Constant. This society amused itself with music (an Italian musician, Albertine's master, who played the guitar, being of the company), and with a quaint invention named *La petite poste*. This consisted in abolishing conversation and substituting for it little notes, which were passed from one to the other. A very innocent amusement ; but either it, or the guitar-playing, or "Corinne's" famous name made some noise in the neighbourhood.

Finally, one evening Madame de Staël went to the theatre at Blois, and, on leaving it, was surrounded by a curious crowd. Some officious person communi-

cated this fact, probably with various others, some true, some false, to the Minister of Police, who wrote to the Prefect of the department to complain that his master's celebrated foe was the centre of a little court. In a short time the blog fell. No answer came from Napoleon, but, instead of it, the announcement that her book had been seized, that all copies of it were destroyed, and that the authoress was to leave France within three days either for America or Coppet. At the same time, the Prefect of Loir and Cher demanded the surrender of the MS. of the work. Fortunately Madame de Staël possessed a rough copy, which she gave him, while her son saved the real one.

She wrote to Savary, Duke of Rovigo ("permitted," she says bitingly "to hide his name under a title"), and represented to him that the interval allowed her for her departure was insufficient. She received a reply which has become classic for its baseness, its insolence, and its ludicrous arrogance. All the littleness and none of the force of Napoleon was reflected from the mind of his underling. He told her that she need not seek for the cause of her exile in the silence regarding the Emperor which she had observed in her work; for that no place in it could have been found worthy of him! For the rest, the air of France did not suit her, and as for its inhabitants they were not yet reduced to taking as models the nations whom she admired. Her last work was not French, and it was he (this worthy official) who had forbidden it to be printed.

Savary thus claimed for himself, and not for his master, the glory of this precious proceeding; but as nobody suspected him of acting except under orders, he blew this trumpet to the desert air.

The blow to Madame de Staël was a terrible one. Her first impulse was to go to America; but fearing the long sea-voyage for her daughter at that season of the year (it was October), she once again set her face most reluctantly towards Cappet. This place, which she henceforward describes as a "prison," was shortly afterwards made further distasteful to her by a change of Prefect. Monsieur de Barante, who was a friend of hers, was removed, and the successor appointed to him, M. Capelle, was one of the functionaries now turned out by the gross from the Imperial mould. He regarded Napoleon as a deity and himself as his prophet, and conceived the brilliant idea of distinguishing himself by persuading Madame de Staël to write something flattering of the Emperor. Naturally he failed: the mind of a bureaucrat prostrate before the fetich of his own alarmed idolatry alone could have conceived the possibility of success. And naturally, again, his failure rankled, and caused him to visit his disappointment on the creator of it by numerous small vexations.

## CHAPTER XII.

## MADAME DE STAËL'S SECOND MARRIAGE.

MADAME DE STAËL arrived at Coppet in a condition of despair, which she partially solaced by writing to Madame Récamier and thanking her again and again for the constancy of her friendship. Evidently many of her friends had already dropped away, or she fancied they had. Perhaps she wearied them a little with her lamentations, for one knows that silence was never her forte. But all at once a happy change came over her. Sismondi, writing to the Countess of Albany, mentioned the transformation, and spoke of their friend with admiration for her new-born but to him inexplicable courage. She had given up literary work, and no longer alluded to her afflictions; and yet, in spite of that, her gaiety was great and her conversation as charming and sparkling as ever. Sismondi doubtless considered that Reason—his beloved Reason was at last asserting its sway over “Corinne’s” excitable imagination. He must have been greatly surprised a long time afterwards when he learnt that the

magician was Love. Years previously, when Sismondi had himself been in love in his decorous fashion, and had reproached Madame de Staël for a want of sympathy in his trouble—a want which he had not expected in the author of *Delphine*—she said to him: “I have never loved that I have not felt in myself two persons.—one who laughed at the other.” But when she made that answer she was young and restless, and, like all great and burning minds, claimed from life a destiny too radiant to be ever realised. Now she was middle-aged; she had drunk of the waters of bitterness and known some of the tragic awakenings of passion; she had experienced an immeasurable sorrow in the loss of her father; she had become familiar to satiety with the triumphs of the world; and was, as she wrote to Madame Récamier, “wearied of suffering.” In short, the moment had come when the one imperious cry of her soul was for peace. In such a state of mind what seems ridiculous becomes possible, and the spirit of mocking youth in Madame de Staël, which once could laugh at the passionate half of her nature, was buried with most of her hopes and almost all of her illusions.

It was shortly after her return to Switzerland that, going to Geneva to spend some little while, she first met Rocca. He was twenty-three, she was forty-five; but that disparity of years did not prevent his conceiving for her a most romantic passion. He was extremely handsome—a fact to which Frederica Brun and Byron alike bear witness, and was further interesting through having been wounded in the war in Spain, and so badly that his health was never restored. He was the son of a Councillor of State in Geneva, and descended from a noble Piedmontese family which had

emigrated to Switzerland during the persecution of the Protestants. He had some culture and considerable intelligence; was even something of an author; and, finally, was a splendid horseman. He was wont to ride a magnificent black Andalusian steed, and performed unheard-of feats of jumping and galloping under the windows of the house in Geneva where Madame de Staël was staying. These varied attractions finally proved irresistible to the object of his homage, and before the year 1811 a secret marriage took place. Why it was a secret is one of those mysteries which has never been satisfactorily cleared up. One explanation is that Bonaparte, out of hatred of Madame de Staël, would order Rocca, who, of course, was in the French army, away on service. But if this had been the real reason, it was sufficiently strong to have rendered any further explanation unnecessary. Nevertheless, a very good authority, the authoress of *Coppet et Weimar*, gives two other reasons: one that Madame de Staël would "never have consented to give up the aristocratic name which she had made so illustrious"; the other, that the world would have turned such a marriage into ridicule. In this connection it is worth while to state that Constant has given Madame de Staël's unwillingness to change her name as a reason why she would not consent to an open marriage with him.

The union with Rocca seems to have been a very happy one; but inasmuch as it passed for years in the eyes of everybody for a connection of another nature, there is no doubt that it brought Madame de Staël into some discredit. Many of the guests at Coppet admired Rocca, but Sismondi, for one, disliked him extremely. Sismondi, however, was not unfrequently disposed to

he rather severe on Madame de Staël and her guests ; he even carped a little at the lovely Juliette. "She (Madame Récamier) has put in a fleeting appearance hère," he wrote in August 1811. " She is full of kindness and graciousness towards Madame de Staël, and is not less pretty than two years ago, and yet I am glad that she is going. For whenever she is present, all true conversation is destroyed. She always beguiles her neighbour into low-toned *tête-à-tête* talk. Her small airs and graces weary me, and her intelligence —for she is intelligent—in no way profits the public."

Sismondi sometimes visited Madame de Staël herself with criticism not less captious, although he was generally vanquished in the end by her heroism and her charm. During the summer of 1811 she was in a very restless and unhappy mood, which often drew forth his censure.

The conviction of the extreme disfavour with which Napoleon regarded her was now widely spread, and one of its results was a real or fancied falling-off of friends, which wounded her exceedingly. To nothing was she so sensitive as to any failure of affection, and the ardour with which she sought to defend herself from blame was caused not so much by offended self-love as by slighted feeling of a more amiable kind. Just about this time she wrote to Camille Jordan a very characteristic letter. Its tone was indignant, for Jordan, always rather cold and repellent, had evidently stung her by some censure of her conduct. Apparently also, he had sought to justify himself for not coming to see her, for she assured him that she had never dreamed of blaming him, nor entertained a thought against his loyalty. She quivered under a shaft which had struck more deeply home, and in one

sentence made an allusion applying apparently to Rocca. She owned that being placed, as it appeared to her, on the highest pinnacle of moral dignity, she had felt some wonder at the fact that Jordan, "indulgent towards the inconceivable conduct of Girando," should have reserved all his wrath for an unhappy woman who, "while resisting all attacks and defending her children and her talent at the risk of happiness, security, and life," had allowed herself to be momentarily touched by the self-sacrificing chivalry of a young man. Her anger was but fleeting, and a few months later she wrote as affectionately as ever to Camille, who, perhaps, for once had been shaken from his prudent calm by her fiery words, and had calmed her by protesting unaltered regard.

This year of 1811 was fruitful of sorrow. Mathieu de Montmorency and Madame Récamier were both exiled immediately after a visit paid by them to their illustrious friend. According to Madame Lenormant, the writer of *Coppet et Weimar*, as well as to Madame de Staël herself, the letter from the Minister of Police which conveyed the order of exile to Mathieu de Montmorency distinctly signified that friendship with the mistress of Coppet was the cause of his disgrace. Sismondi, however, who showed himself incredulous and to a certain extent unsympathising throughout all these circumstances, when writing to the Countess of Albany, was concerned to correct such an impression, and declared that not only had the Prefect of Geneva and the Minister of the French Police disclaimed the idea as unfounded, but he himself had never seen that anybody was in the least compromised by going to Coppet. Nevertheless, in a very short time Schlegel was ordered to quit the Château on the preposterous

plea that he had pronounced the *Phœdra* of Euripides to be superior to that of Racine ! Madame de Staël went to Aix for the sake of her youngest son's health, but at the end of ten days was recalled by a letter from the Prefect, who advised her not to venture more than two leagues from Coppet. Very naturally she was irritated to the last degree and often deeply distressed at all these incidents. The exile imposed on Mathieu de Montmorency and Madame Récamier caused her the greatest grief, more especially as she never doubted but that unwittingly she was the cause. She had other causes of suffering also in her health at the time, and doubtless was far from being as brilliant as of yore.

Circumstances (she had a son by Rocca in 1812) condemned her to an isolation which fretted her almost beyond endurance ; and Sismondi, not possessing the key to the situation, was aggrieved at her sombre mood and nervous irritability. He wrote that he sometimes "bores himself" at Coppet (O Ichabod!) ; and he was reduced to take refuge with sundry amiable persons at Geneva who soothed his wounded self-love.

At last Madame de Staël—inconsolable for the loss of Schlegel's society, panting to escape beyond the narrow limits of Coppet, where her sons had no career before them, and her daughter no chance of marrying, and she herself was harassed by hints and admonitions from the Prefect at every turn—resolved upon escape. She was informed, through Schlegel, who was in Berne at the time, that if she would even now write something in praise of Napoleon her fate would be considerably mitigated. It is no slight credit to her that, agitated and ill as she was,

she firmly declined. Nothing, indeed, at such a moment could have been more courageous than her refusal, for she was torn with a thousand fears at her impending journey. The passport would have been an insuperable difficulty, as the permission to go to America, once accorded, had now been withdrawn from her; entrance into Italy was also denied, and the Government was determined that she should not take refuge in England. Yet to England she was resolved to go. The only route open to her was through Russia and Sweden. Through her friend the Grand Duchess of Weimar she obtained a passport, which was to be handed to her in Vienna. All this took months to settle, and it was only on the 23rd of May 1812 that she was at last able to start. It was necessary to leave in such a way as not to excite the attention of the lynx-eyed Prefect of Geneva.

The eve of her departure she wandered about the park of Coppet, a prey to the utmost grief. She had been unwilling to return there at one time; but now she was heartbroken at having to bid a long, perhaps a last, farewell to the tomb of her father and the scenes associated with his memory. To her, both by nature and system, such a parting was particularly poignant.

At 2 o'clock on the afternoon of the 23rd, she got into her carriage, announcing that she would return for dinner. Only two of her servants were in the secret. Albertine, Auguste, and Rocca were with her; her second son was to follow in a few days, and join her at Vienna with her baggage. For the present, all the necessaries which the travellers absolutely needed were stowed away in the pockets of Auguste and Rocca; Madame de Staël and Albertine only carried fans.

The escape thus ingeniously planned was carried out with a success that it is quite pleasant to read of, even to this moment. The police never awoke at all to the fact of the flight until the luggage followed the fugitives, and then Madame de Staël was beyond their reach. History draws a veil over the feelings of the Prefect.

At Berne, Schlegel joined the party, and Auguste de Staël separated from it, in order to return to Coppet and see after things there. The travellers pushed on, but, because of Madame de Staël's health, in no great haste, through Switzerland and the Tyrol. Her one haunting fear all this time was that in Bavaria an agent of the French Government might have preceded her with an order for her arrest. The abject subservience of the German Governments at that time to Napoleon made it very likely that in such a case passports would be so much waste-paper.

Vienna was reached in safety, and there Madame de Staël at first determined to remain three weeks, while a courier was despatched to Wilna to obtain the Russian passport from the Emperor Alexander. The first ten days of her sojourn were marked by cloudless pleasure. Security had returned to her; and, after her late repression, varied chiefly by the Prefect of Geneva's solemn exhortations, it was a real delight to find herself in the midst of a society where Napoleon was frankly abused. But the Emperor and Empress of Austria were at Dresden, and the official mind, left to itself, soon became frightened at the idea of sheltering the dangerous authoress. Spies were stationed at her door, and cropped up, like poisonous fungi, with silent rapidity along her path. Moreover, an order had arrived for the arrest and return of Rocca as a French

officer—the fact of his wounds, and ‘inability to serve’ being waived in the interests of persecution. At this point, one pauses to ask *why*, after all, Madame de Staël herself was not arrested. There seems but little doubt that the obsequiousness of the Austrian police would have been equal to the task. Perhaps Napoleon shrank from the odium of such a proceeding; perhaps he was, in reality, rather glad to be rid of Madame de Staël. This would agree with a well-known conversation which he had held, four years previously with Auguste de Staël, who, going to him to plead for his mother’s recall, was told, with insolent, good-humoured contempt, that the whole of Europe, except France, was open to her; that she would not be imprisoned, as then she might have some cause to complain, but that she alone could be unhappy when allowed to wander at will through every capital of Europe except Paris.

But if this explanation be accepted, it becomes difficult to account for the later persecutions of Madame de Staël at the hands of the French and Swiss police. Could it be that Savary and his underlings, through excess of zeal, interpreted their instructions with liberal severity, and that Napoleon was not responsible for every individual act, but only for the angry hatred which promised approval of each and all of them?

However this may be, Madame de Staël’s fears were not long in reasserting themselves. Too impatient to wait for the passport, she started with her son and daughter for Galicia, having extracted from a friend the promise of hurrying after her as soon as the expected paper arrived. In her *Memoirs* she admits that this was a mistake; for at Vienna she had friends to intercede in her favour, while in Galicia

there was no shield between herself and the servility towards France of inferior officials. As a consequence she was driven along her route by the unceasing admonitions to "move on" of the police. Her immediate goal was Lanzut—the home of her friends Prince and Princess Lubomirski. Here she was to meet Rocca, who had also proceeded on his way, but disguised. At some point of the road her passport reached her. This was a ray of light; and a letter from Madame Récamier, which overtook her somewhere near Olmutz, was another. But, as a rule, her sensations were all gloomy. The discomforts of her journey through such a country and under such circumstances increased her sadness, to which the finishing touch was put by the aspect of the desolated countries, and of the overtaxed starving populations withering beneath the Napoleonic blight, and mingling curses on the oppressor with prayers to heaven for relief.

These tragic pictures were ludicrously, but by no means reassuringly relieved by the sight of placards, in the various towns where the passports had to be examined, which ordained that Madame de Staël was to be submitted, wherever she appeared, to the surveillance of the police!

At Lanzut she had been informed that she was not to stay more than twenty-four hours. This, however, was previous to her receiving the Russian passport. With that to show, she hoped for more indulgence.

The hope was vain, for at Lanzut a police agent presented himself, having received orders from his chief, the Governor of the district, to see that Madame de Staël did not remain more than eight hours at the Lubomirski's Château. And when she left, he fol-

lowed her carriage in a calèche, thus causing her much alarm lest Rocca, on joining them, should be recognised.

Fifty leagues of Austrian territory had still to be traversed. The police agent, who is described as carrying out his instructions with a most vexatious pertinacity, quitted the travellers at the limit of his "circle"; but Madame de Staël says that grenadiers were still found posted along the route to observe her, and she did not breathe freely until she found herself on Russian territory. Even there she could not allow herself to feel quite secure, for Napoleon's huge army—destined by its apparent power and its oncoming doom to typify the falling might of France—was hastening by forced marches to Moscow; and Madame de Staël, to avoid meeting it, had to reach St. Petersburg by a circuitous route. Her terror of being arrested and imprisoned still abode with her; she was evidently convinced that the Emperor was furious with her for having escaped his clutches; and she began seriously to consider what she would do if any portion of the army threatened to overtake her. Her plan was to hasten on to Odessa, and thence proceed to Greece and Constantinople.

Fortunately, her companions succeeded in persuading her that she could travel, by post, much faster than an army; and partially calmed, she at last gave herself up to some enjoyment of the scenes and people around her. Her *Dix Années d'Exil*, always vivid, becomes from this point a charming book. She is a little too optimistic, and indulges, as usual, too much in generalization, but seizes on salient points with swiftness, and describes them with remarkable force.  
She was delighted with her reception by the nobles,

and the Imperial family. Of the Czar she speaks with a fervent admiration that later generations have not shared. He had the facile amiability and conventional philanthropy of a sovereign who finds his benevolent theories so constantly crossed by circumstances as to release him, in most instances, from the responsibility of applying them: But any promise of political reform and any appeal to general principles of excellence, found so ready a response in Madame de Staël's own heart that, especially where a monarch spoke, she ceased to be severely critical.

According to Galiffe, she met in Russia with immense social success, and enchanted everybody. He, personally, found her much improved since the days of her brilliant, but too self-asserting youth.

Stein was struck with her air of simplicity and goodness, and sought to convey her great unaffectedness of manner by saying that "she gave herself no trouble to please"—quite a man's judgment on a woman, and curiously inaccurate as a necessary consequence. Madame de Staël was so intensely interested in every new person who appeared to her at all distinguished, that she must always have cared supremely to please. But what Stein probably meant was that she had none of the airs and graces of worldly coquettes; and very often, when launched in conversation, she must have been more bent on convincing than seducing.

Madame de Staël passes over in her *Mémoirs* a scene at the theatre, during her visit to St. Petersburg, which wounded her deeply, and is related by Arndt. She went with her son and somebody else to the "Théâtre Français," to see Racine's *Phèdre*. Scarcely was she seated, when somebody in the pit

denounced her and her companions as French. Instantly the people rose and clamoured for them to be turned out. The performance was stopped; the actors decamped; and poor Madame de Staël, sobbing with indignation and grief, was led away. Even then she felt the insult chiefly as levelled at Racine, and repeated incessantly, "*Oh ! les barbares, les barbares ! Oh, mon Racine !*" Arndt was rather astonished at her taking such a scene so much to heart; but, on reflection, arrived at the conclusion that German women might be the better, for a little of the same passionate patriotism.

But unpleasant incidents during her stay in the Russian capital seem to have been few. She visited several institutions; was received everywhere with politeness and cordiality; and revelled again, as she had done in Vienna, in listening to the free expression of sentiments that agreed with her own. Events, however, were progressing rapidly, and, in spite of the engagement never to sign a peace entered into by the Czar with Bernadotte at Abo, the battle of Borodino and the taking of Moscow filled most people with dismay. Madame de Staël, always easily alarmed, thought that the moment had arrived when she could no longer remain in Russia with safety, and she set her face towards Sweden, *en route* for England; thus quitting St. Petersburg a few days too soon to receive in all its force the electric shock of learning that Moscow was fired. At Abo, where she was to embark for Stockholm, she met Bernadotte, now Prince Royal of Sweden, whom she had formerly known in Paris as an *habitué* of her own and Madame Récamier's salon. Of course he admired the lovely Juliette, and hastened to inquire after her with an interest which Madame de

Staël straightway conveyed in a letter to her friend—a letter worded, however, with a caution that reveals the inconceivable difficulty even of private correspondence in those stormy days.

At Stockholm she was welcomed, according to her son, with "perfect kindness"; and as she was notoriously enthusiastic about Bernadotte, whom she unhesitatingly pronounced to be "the hero of the age," it is probable that he honoured her with a great deal of his confidence. Galiffe (author of *D'un siècle à l'autre*), who had access to her correspondence from Sweden with J. A. Galiffe in St. Petersburg, was of opinion that her influence had a large share in determining Bernadotte to declare himself against Bonaparte.

She dedicated her *Réflexions sur le Suicide*, to the Prince in a very complimentary preface, in which she compared herself and her children as seeking his protection in the same way as Arabian Shepherds take shelter from a storm "under a laurel"; and went on to assure him that his public life had been signalised by all the virtues which claim the admiration of thinkers, and she encouraged him to persevere and remind the world of that which it had entirely forgotten, namely, that the highest reason teaches virtue. In contrast to all this praise, it is piquant to learn that Bernadotte—like so many other practically-minded people—had his little grumble at his illustrious guest; and talked of the "inconceivable preoccupation with self," which by this time had led Madame de Staël to see in every political move of Napoleon the beginning of some new measure against herself. . . .

Her oft-professed anxiety about 'her sons' future was allayed by the Prince Royal's offer to interest

himself in Auguste's diplomatic career, while Albert was to enter the Swedish army.

One might wonder why this obvious solution of her difficulties had not presented itself sooner to Madame de Staël, were it not evident that she had consciously or unconsciously made the most of every circumstance which could heighten the apparent hardship of her lot.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

## ENGLAND AGAIN.

AFTER quitting Sweden, Madame de Staël went to England. Some eighteen years or so had passed since she had wept in the lanes at Mickleham at the thought of separating from the charming colony at Juniper Hall. Her heart was still almost as young as in those days ; the vivid flame of enthusiasm for all that was good still burnt as brightly in her soul. If her spiritual horizon had widened, and a fervent if rather vague religious sentiment had succeeded to her unquestioning faith in men—that was almost all the change in her: For her nature was a singularly homogeneous one, and growth, while widening and deepening it, did not render it more complex.

Her reception in English society was marked by all the enthusiasm which we are accustomed to lavish on illustrious foreigners. She was mobbed at routs and assemblies, and ladies mounted on chairs and tables to stare at her.

She took up her abode at 30, Angyll Place, Regent Street, a house now a bathing establishment. It

was here that she received the mixed but brilliant society which Byron declared reminded him of the grave, inasmuch as all distinctions were levelled in it !

These social meetings formed her protest against the enormous and overcrowded gatherings which were dignified then, as now, with the name of "society" in London, and where Madame de Staël found that all intellectual enjoyment was smothered by sheer force of numbers. She was willing enough to admit that clever men and women in England were transcendently interesting when caught in sufficiently small groups to make rational conversation possible ; but declared that all qualities of mind were annihilated in the crowds, where the only superiority necessary was physical force to enable one to elbow one's way along.

Byron and Madame de Staël became very good friends, although she rated him about his conduct in love ; and he laughed, with quiet malice, at many of her peculiarities. One of his favourite diversions—or, at least, so he said—was to plague her by declaring that he did not believe in Napoleon's "persecutions." Nothing made her more angry, he declared, inasmuch as she was proud of the danger which, as she believed, threatened Napoleon's Government from her eloquence and her fame. Byron, in his *Conversations with Lady Blessington*, told one or two stories of "Corinne," more diverting probably than veracious, and complained of her overwhelming declamation (as distinguished from talk), her tendency to metaphysical subtleties, her extraordinary self-complacency, and the strange simplicity which caused her to be perpetually mystified. But he admitted that she was "a fine creature with great talent and many noble qualities." ;

and he loudly proclaimed her immeasurable superiority to every woman with pretensions to literary fame in England. He even found several things to admire in her appearance, which in a man of his taste was a very precious testimony, and might have consoled Madame de Staël, had she only known of it, for those personal defects which were said to afflict her.

The person who in all England appears to have been the best match, conversationally, for Madame de Staël was Sir James Mackintosh, who, perhaps, gave the best of all descriptions of her when he said, "She is one of the few persons who surpass expectation. She has every sort of talent, and would be universally popular if, in society, she were to confine herself to her inferior talents—pleasantry, anecdote, and literature, which are so much more suited to conversation than her eloquence and genius." At another time he remarked : "Her penetration was certainly extraordinary, with an air of apparent occupation in things immediately around her." He recorded, not always approvingly, some of her sweeping judgments, as, for instance, that "Political Economy was prosaic and uninteresting," and that "Miss Austen's novels were commonplace."

Her stay in England was saddened, although apparently not very deeply so, by the violent death of her younger son. Byron's flippant allusion to this tragic event has brought him into much disrepute. "Madame de Staël," he wrote, "has lost one of her young Barons, who has been carbonaded by a vile Teutonic adjutant. . . . 'Corinne' is, of course, what all mothers must be, but will, I venture to prophesy, do what few mothers could—write an essay upon it. She cannot exist without a grievance and somebody to see or read

how much grief becomes her." All these epigrammatic previsions turned out to be apparently unfounded; for there is no proof that Madame de Staël mourned her son with anything approaching to the passion with which she had grieved for her father. Sismondi, indeed, always censorious, is rather severe on what he is pleased to consider her want of maternal feeling; and, as she was never known to hide her sentiments, it is only fair to conclude that comparative silence meant comparative insensibility. Albert de Staël was very high-spirited and impetuous, and rather wild. Judging from a severe and somewhat self-righteous epistle addressed to him on one occasion by his mother, he had many of the faults that irritated, and none of the qualities that pleased her. Auguste and Albertine, inspired by their adoring veneration, presumably tried to mould their tastes and pursuits by hers; but Albert appears to have been different—for his mother reproaches him with remaining unmoved by her own intellect, the dignity of his brother, the charm of his sister, and the talents of M. Schlegel! She assures him that he is unfit to appreciate the mother whom he possesses, and very characteristically requests to be told of what service it has been to him to be "the grandson of Necker." Neither the invocation of this august memory, nor the general drift of the arguments, strike one as happily chosen for moving a thoughtless lad in his teens, who was probably drawn towards his brother and sister by other reasons than their respective dignity and charm, and was more than likely to be secretly bored by the disquisitions of the learned Schlegel. However this may be, the letter gives the full measure of the contempt which Madame de Staël could feel for folly and frivolity; and, if those

were the distinguishing characteristics of Albeft, it is very comprehensible that, the first pangs of natural grief overcome, his loss would not leave a great void in her active existence.

In the autumn of 1813 *L'Allemagne*, was published. It appeared in London, and straightway caused the greatest ferment known for a long while in the literary world. The circumstances under which it saw the light—the social position, sex, and history of its author—and its own intrinsic merits, combined to make it an event. It is notorious how much Sir James Mackintosh and Byron admired it; and articles concerning it, critical and laudatory, poured from the European press. Goethe admitted that no previous writer had so largely revealed the riches of German literature to the intelligence of an unappreciative generation; and although the great Teutonic race was not fully satisfied with the work at the time, and has since become somewhat captious regarding it, the talent which it displayed has never been called in question. By a sufficiently striking coincidence the publication of *L'Allemagne* took place in the same month as the battle of Leipzig. Only a brief period then elapsed before Napoleon abdicated, and Madame de Staël, her splendid and triumphant exile terminated, was enabled once more to re-enter the gates of beloved but, alas! humiliated Paris. She was far too patriotic not to entertain saddened feelings on seeing the streets of the capital filled with soldiers in German, Russian, and Cossack uniforms; for while rejoicing in the overthrow of Napoleon, she mourned the tarnished glory of the French arms.

She was received with the utmost cordiality by Louis XVIII., and her salon quickly became the

rallying-ground for all the brightest intellects of France: It is interesting to read that Talleyrand—the supple, silent, time-serving Talleyrand—was among her guests. She forgave him, of course, for his long oblivion of her old claims on his friendship; but not more thoroughly, in all probability, than he forgave himself. To Paris had returned the Abbé de Montesquion, Lally, Tollendal, Lafayette. How changed were the times since the latter had hurried thither to plead, and plead in vain, for his imprisoned King; since the Abbé had waited in disguise on the highroad for Madame de Staël to arrive in her carriage and convey him out of France; since Lally, “the fattest of susceptible men,” had brought his eloquence and sensibility to help in enlivening the sylvan glades of Mickleham.

Madame Récamier had returned and Constant, at the ripe age of forty-eight and married for the second time, was so in love with her as to resent any allusion to the past which could divert him, even momentarily, from his all-absorbing passion.

Madame de Krüdener, worn and wasted with sybilline fervour, had commenced her religious gatherings, and the Czar was drawn daily within the circle of her spells; while Madame Récamier was banished from it, because her beauty could still claim glances that were vowed to heaven. Constant, going once, never went again; perhaps because Juliette was wanting; perhaps because such mystic utterances as fell from the inspired priestess's lips were too vague to find an echo in his passion-tossed soul. To Paris also had come Bonstetten, younger than ever in spirit, and hopeful, for all his burden of years.

The dawn of the new era—so quickly clouded for

more serious and prescient souls than his—filled him with delight. He was brighter and more contented now than he had been in youth; the world seemed a better place to him, and he almost wondered how anybody could be sad in a universe so full of new ideas and dazzling intellectual possibilities.'

Besides all these interesting figures, other and more splendid, if not more illustrious, personages crowded Madame de Staël's salon. Thither came the Czar, so chivalrous and sympathetic in these days; thither came her old friend the Duke of Saxe Weimar; and Wellington presented himself to be received with the utmost cordiality, and to inscribe himself on the long list of Madame Récamier's admirers.

At first Madame de Staël's heart beat high with patriotic hopes. She had become monarchical in her feelings again, and expected great things for France from the liberal disposition of the King. She exerted herself quite in her old way to talk over dissidents and reconcile malcontents; for her one longing was that the new constitution of France might be made on the pattern and informed with the spirit of England. But she was not slow to discover how ill-founded were such aspirations. Egotism stalked through the exhausted land—egotism under various forms and professing various creeds; now wearing the superannuated uniform of the Maison Rouge; now decorated with the medals conferred by Napoleon; now prating of old services before the emigration; now professing a servile repentance for base obedience to Bonaparte. They were but differences in the mask after all; yet over these différences men wrangled, and meanwhile the poison of a deadly indifference crept through the veins of France. Madame de Staël

saw all this, and felt it with a passionate regret. In the last volume of her *Considerations* she shows how everything was accorded in the letter, only to be constantly violated in the spirit. She deplored the irreconcilable folly of the *émigrés*; the abject cringing of converted Bonapartists, who only cared for power; and the disastrous reactionary influences which hampered the action of the Court.

She returned for the summer to Coppet—a very welcome refuge to her now that she went thither of her own free will. Her health was beginning to fail about this time, while that of M. Rocca gave her constant anxiety. Originally she had been blest, if not with a splendid constitution, at least with a royal disdain of physical influences. She had felt neither heat nor cold, and spoke even with a certain impatience of invalid considerations. But she had lived at such high pressure intellectually from her very earliest years; had thought, felt, talked, and done so much, that her existence could not be counted, like most people's, by years. In the sense of accumulated efforts and results it had been a very long life, and the expenditure of nervous energy so constantly kept up was beginning to tell at last. Even Bonstetten, the optimist, saw a change in her when in July 1814 he visited her at Coppet. She was, indeed, very depressed in spirits; but he appeared to allude only to a physical alteration, for he declared her to be as brilliant and good as ever. He might have added as indefatigable. She found somebody to translate Wilberforce's work on the Slave Trade, and wrote a preface to the French edition. Also she published, in pamphlet form, an appeal for Abolition addressed to the Sovereigns met together at that time in Paris; and she was busy with

her work, *Considerations*, of which the first two parts alone were eventually revised by herself.

In July, from Coppet, she wrote a characteristic letter to Madame Récamier, telling what difficulty she experienced in keeping up the fine love of solitude, which had beguiled her momentarily into seeking that picturesque and sacred but monotonous retreat. "My soul is not sufficiently rural," she writes. "I regret your little apartment and our quarrels and conversations, and all that life which is yours." In this sturdy love of streets, Madame de Staël resembled Dr Johnson and, perhaps, if the truth were known, she resembled all good talkers.

She returned to Paris in the winter of 1814-15, and, conscious that her strength was failing, she became extremely anxious to marry her darling daughter to some man who would be worthy of her. Her circumstances had been recently much improved by the repayment, from the Treasury, of the two millions which Necker had left there. Such wealth, joined to her own brilliant social position, entitled her to look out for a good *parti* for Albertine; but she was resolute that the match should be a happy one. Her ideal of felicity was conjugal love. She preached, indeed, a code of wifely submission that would seem very insipid to some emancipated damsels in our days, and was perhaps a little too perfect to be possible. But she put into it all her own rare faith in good, and often laughingly declared that "she would force her daughter to make a marriage of the heart."

In the midst of these amiable preoccupations, and while enjoying once again the delight of social intercourse, unhampered by foreign modes of speech and thought, and untroubled by the irritation of exile,

Madame de Staël was still haunted by a foreboding of evil. Such presentiments were very common with her. She had the quick, indefinable instinct of imaginative minds, and felt that subtle vibration of events which precedes, or perhaps causes, change in them. Probably she hardly knew what she anticipated ; and yet, when the news of Napoleon's escape from Elba arrived, it seemed as if the expected disaster could only be that. An hour after she met M. de la Valette, and said to him : " If Bonaparte triumph, liberty is lost ; and if he be beaten, our national independence is over."

A few days of utter consternation followed—a pause of bewildered, incapable silence, through which, as Châteaubriand graphically says, "the sound of Bonaparte's advancing footsteps echoed." Then came the news of one town and province after another rallying round the standard of the resurgent conqueror. Ney departed, vowing to bring back his former master in an iron cage ; and the vain boast, so quickly yet not ludicrously disproved, inspired as little confidence as it deserved.

The Court prepared for ignominious flight, and Madame de Staël had no choice but to follow its example. But a few months previously she had by chance become aware of a conspiracy against Napoleon's life, and, for all her hatred of him, had been so moved by the menace of peril to her ancient and implacable foe, that she had found means to despatch a warning to him. Yet now, when she heard of his return, all her terror of him revived in its pristine force, bringing back with it the flood of agitated imagination which had so long poisoned her life.

Villemain has left a record of the evening of the

18<sup>th</sup> March 1815, which he passed in the salon of the Countess Rumford, and where he met Madame de Staël. Several famous, and to us now familiar, personages were present—Lafayette, Constant, Jan-court, Cuvier, Sismondi, and Lemercier, among others. Every moment somebody arrived with news of the advancing hero. Madame de Staël came late, and instantly attracted the general attention to herself. She was overwhelmed with sadness, but more for France even than for herself. She had been at the Tuilleries, and found that there all hope of resistance was abandoned. Her own mind was made up for flight, yet she urged Madame de Rumford to remain, showing that she considered Napoleon's hatred of herself to be inextinguishable and as active as ever. In point of fact, Napoleon's earliest care, on reaching the capital, was to express his regret at her departure. It is very unlikely that he would have molested her in any way had she remained ; but it was ordained that, to the last, he should make her suffer even more in imagination than in reality. She urged Madame Récamier to escape with her, for Juliette's prescription never having been formally revoked, Madame de Staël considered her danger as great as her own. But Madame Récamier, more calm, refused. With her remained also Benjamin Constant, although he also was admonished by Madame de Staël to seek safety in another land. His career during the Hundred Days is well known. He began by attacking Napoleon violently, then had an interview with him, was fascinated, converted, appointed a councillor of state, and helped to edit the *Acte Additionnel*. Another convert was the sober-minded Sismondi, and several people have asserted, on the authority first of an Eng-

lish editor, and then of M. Thiers, that the great, the irreconcilable "Corinne" herself, gave in a tardy but complete adhesion. Ste. Beuve endorsed the error, and based his belief upon the style of an unsigned note in French found among Lord Castlereagh's posthumous papers, and attributed by Lord Londonderry's secretary to Madame de Staël. This letter was supposed to have been written at Coppet and forwarded to Mr. Crawford, the American minister in Paris, in order that he might take it to London. Its object was to inspire English statesmen with the writer's own belief in Napoleon's new-found sincerity, and to recommend his government to their support.

A comparison of dates shows, however, that such a letter, if despatched from Coppet, could only have reached Paris twenty-four hours after Mr. Crawford's departure, and Thiers's assumption that Madame de Staël remained in Paris during the Hundred Days is disproved by her correspondence from Switzerland with Madame Récamier. Finally, and again according to Thiers, Sismondi's conversion was a result of Madame de Staël's own change of views. But this also appears quite untenable, inasmuch as Sismondi himself bears testimony to her resentment against Napoleon, strengthened, as he says, "to a blind and violet hatred." This is the natural language of a person who *has* veered about of another person who *has not*, and the expression occurs in a letter of Sismondi's written from Coppet a short time after Waterloo, and when he had gone to the château in some doubt as to the nature of the reception there awaiting him. He had been much relieved to find his hostess as cordial as ever. Madame de Staël, indeed, never seems to have willingly or spontaneously

given up any friend whom she had once admitted to the title. Politics are apt to envenom the most intimate relations, but they left no bitterness in *her* great and gentle soul. Alas ! the happy days at Coppet were numbered now for most of those whom we have seen congregating there through so many exciting summers.

Madame de Staël delighted in the exercise of a generous hospitality. Nobody ever seems to have managed her business affairs better than she did, and among the few apparent contradictions of her transparent nature was the spirit of order in which she dealt with life, as soon as the things presented to her consideration were hard facts and not sentiments. In all administrative matters she had the capacity of a true Frenchwoman, and, while systematic and careful, was the least avaricious of women.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## CLOSING SCENES.

AFTER Waterloo, Madame de Staël did not return to France. The thought of the second occupation by foreign troops was odious to her, and, besides this, she feared the outbreak of reactionary feelings, and fore-saw a political condition in which her pure and ideal liberalism would be equally unwelcome to all parties.

Rocca's state of health finally induced her to go to Italy. From Milan she sent a letter to Madame Récamier, which is interesting as showing how little her fine mind and noble heart were in harmony just then with the condition of affairs in France.

"You are kind enough to say to me," she wrote, "that I should do better to be in Paris. But no, indeed, I should not care to see some forms of liberty (*franchises*) 'accorded' to the people, for it is my creed that nations are born free. I should say unfashionable things, and make enemies unnecessarily. When all is arranged for Albertine's marriage, I shall lead a solitary life in Paris; but at present I do well, believe me, to have myself represented by Auguste. Like you, I think well, and better than ever, of Victor de Broglie, and I shall be very glad of the marriage if

nōthing goes against it. I am also of your way of thinking in regard to Madame de Krüdener. She is the herald of a great oncoming religious epoch. Speak of me to her, I beg, as of a person quite devoted to her. . . . M. Rocca's health still gives me anxiety. I have never recovered any happiness since Bonaparte disembarked."

Madame de Staël had been very happy in her marriage with Rocca, and the tenderness with which she regarded him was manifest to all her acquaintances. Under such circumstances, it does seem strange that she should to the last have kept her marriage with him a secret.

The most plausible reason for such a course, fear of Napoleon's spite, existed no longer after Waterloo. Why, then, have gratuitously incurred the reproach of an illicit connection? Why, above all, separate herself for five years from her own and Rocca's child? Such conduct does not on the face of it seem quite consistent with the lofty ideal of duty which Madame de Staël professed.

Albertine's wedding took place in civil form at Leghorn on February 15th, 1815.; and five days later in Pisa a double religious ceremony, one Catholic, the other Protestant, was performed.

All Madame de Staël's friends gave a charming picture of Albertine. Guizot, Lamartine, and Bonstetten were most enthusiastic about her. Their praises were also echoed by Byron, who, needless to say, was no mean judge; and Ticknor, seeing her in Paris about a year after her marriage, never mentioned her except in terms of admiration. She was both beautiful and clever, and, after her mother's death, became, in her turn; the queen of a cosmopolitan salon.

Accompanied by the bride and bridegroom, by Rocca, by Schlegel and Sismondi, Madame de Staël presently betook herself to Florence, and there renewed her acquaintance with the Countess of Albany. Alfieri was dead now, and Fabre reigned in his stead. Madame de Staël appears to have adopted him with the mingled enthusiasm and indulgence which she exhibited towards all the tastes of her friends.

The summer of 1816 was spent in Coppet. The newest and most interesting figure there on this occasion was Byron. He had shaken the dust of England from his feet, and was nursing his lyrical cynicism at Cologny near Geneva. Unfortunately, his reputation was so bad that the virtuous society of the place would not know him. Madame de Staël alone not only received but welcomed him. He was grateful; and so far yielded to the influence which this gratitude enabled her to exercise over him as actually to make an imperfect attempt at reconciliation with his wife, in order to please his eloquent and magnanimous hostess.

It is amusing to note the different impressions which Byron—the charming, reprehensible Byron—made upon the various guests at the Château. Bonstetten, as might be expected, was quite fascinated by him, and wrote to Malthasson of his musical voice and beautiful head; and of the “half-honest little demon” that darted in a lambent way through the sarcasm of his speech. Sismondi—the correct and censorious—dwells more especially on Byron’s cynical contempt for appearances, and the conduct and companionship which had brought him into disrepute with the worthy Genevæse.

Coppet had never been quite as brilliant, probably, as

in this last summer that Madame de Staël was to reign there. The society was more varied in nationality than in the days when a brilliant but small band of intellects had gathered round to console her in her exile. Brougham, Bell, Lady Hamilton, Lord Breadalbane, Romilly, Stendahl, Schlegel, passed in rapid succession over the scene—talked, sparkled—and disappeared. They flashed like meteors, but Madame de Staël shone among them with a steady splendour. Wherever and with whomsoever she was, her powers remained always unquenchable. Nevertheless a great sadness possessed her. This was partly due to her anxiety concerning Rocca—partly to the disappointment inevitable in a spirit which broke impatiently against the limitations of life, the pettiness of human nature. “Ah happiness!” she exclaimed yearningly. Then added, “But at my age no trust is possible but in the goodness of God.”

Bonstetten, parting with her, was struck with the profound melancholy of the glance which she gave him. He had been gay and content, as usual, yet the memory of her look dwelt with him; and unable to explain it, he at last, the dear, genial old man, arrived at the touching conclusion that she had been thinking how old *he* was, and that she would never see him again. The adieu was, indeed, a lasting one; but, it was over Madame de Staël’s radiant path that the shadow of death were to gather first.

Nevertheless, during the winter of 1816–17, and when she returned to Paris, her spirit showed no sign of failing. In her salon gathered Châteaubriand, Talleyrand, Wellington, Humboldt, Blucher, Lafayette, Schlegel and his brother, Canova, and crowds of English. Bonstetten averred that to her influence over

Wellington alone was due—the fact that the Army of Occupation was about this time diminished by 30,000 men.

Just before her death she removed from the Rue Royale to the Rue Neuve des Mathurins ; and it was here that Châteaubriand again, after so many years, saw Madame Récamier, and commenced the romantic friendship which was to end only with his death. He had been invited to dine at Madame de Staël's ; but, when he arrived there, found that she was too ill to entertain the guests. The dinner took place all the same—for Madame de Staël invariably insisted on this, and made her daughter do the honours. They must have been melancholy banquets ; the little Duchess de Broglie presiding with a heavy heart, and all the guests being vividly conscious of the noble life slowly and painfully ebbing away in another room. It is with a certain relief, therefore, in the midst of so much sadness that one reads Châteaubriand's record of his meeting with Juliette. He was selfish and self-conscious and weak no doubt—his fretful uneasy vanity, indeed, pierces through the affected melancholy of the *Mémoires d'Outre Tombe*. They are sickly with a kind of faded perfume ; and yet in the great void which is coming, one is glad to think that the blind Madame Récamier, the aged and feeble Châteaubriand, must often have remembered, perchance often talked of, that dinner where they met in the house of their dying friend.

Her interest in life remained undiminished to the last. Not only Châteaubriand, but Constant, Mathieu de Montmorency, Sismondi, all her old friends, were daily with her. She was even glad to welcome strangers, although frequently so ill that her phy-

sicians forbade such visits for several days at a time. It was after one of these intervals that Ticknor saw her. She received him in bed, and her weakness was already so great that she could hardly stretch out her hand to touch his. She alluded to her approaching end with a calmness infinitely pathetic and admirable in one who suffered none of that slow extinction of the faculties which blunts the anguish of the end for so many departing souls. Seeing that her words pained her daughter, she changed the subject to America, and spoke of the great future of that country with characteristic enthusiasm of belief. Of Europe, Ticknor said, "she despaired." She might well do so, for the era then beginning was one with which she could not have sympathised. Whatever its virtues, its force, its promise, the oracles by which it was inspired must have sounded strange in her ears. Herself, she had been a kind of priestess; through her some unknown God had spoken, and amid the thunder of great events her faith, for all its ideal grandeur, had hardly seemed too mighty. But that age had passed, and it was fit she should pass with it.

All witnesses except the captious Sismondi bear testimony to the devotion with which Rocca nursed his wife in her last illness. Silent, pallid, sad as a phantom itself, he sat day by day beside her bed. According to Madame d'Abbrantes, she never looked long at him without feeling that she might still live. The sense that her existence was necessary to him seemed to inspire her for a moment with the courage to take up anew the increasing burden of her days. But at other times her thoughts turned with a grateful sense of coming rest to the great change, and to the thought of her father "waiting for her," as she said,

"on the other shore." Constant passed the last night of her life by her bedside. She had seemed so much better that at eleven o'clock Mathieu de Montmorency left, convinced that in the morning he would find her revived. She suffered no pain during the concluding hours, and the brightness of her intellect was not even momentarily dimmed. Sleep visited her as usual; then at 5 o'clock she opened her eyes again, for the last time on the world. A few moments later she passed away, so quietly that her watchers did not note the precise moment in which her great soul was exhaled. The date of her death was 14th July 1817.

The news of it was the signal for, perhaps, the most widely-spread and most genuine outburst of grief ever known. Joubert, indeed, asserts the contrary, and not only declares that she was not regretted, but adds that Constant, meeting him casually the very day after the event, did not even allude to it. It never seems to have occurred to Joubert that Constant might have had some other and deeper cause for silence than indifference. From such a nature reserve was perhaps the only tribute that could be more eloquently expressive than the loud lamentations of other friends. These abounded, and even Chateaubriand, who, after all, had not been bound to the dead woman by such ties of constant friendship as attached Schlegel, Sismondi, and others—even he records with a sort of jealous care that in the last letter she ever wrote to Madame de Duras, a letter penned in "large, irregular characters like a child's," there was an affectionate allusion to "Francis."

Bonstetton and Sismondi have both left records of their grief at her funeral. The latter, writing immediately after it to his mother, said: "My life is

painfully changed." I owe more to her than to any other person." Bonstetten's sorrow finds a more energetic expression : "I miss her as though she were a part of myself. I am maimed henceforward in thought."

She was buried at Coppet, and they laid her coffin at the foot of her father's. A crowd of friends, of humble mourners, and of official functionaries, assembled to do her homage ; but Rocca was too ill to be present. He died, indeed, only seven months later, and the son whom Madame de Staël had borne him hardly reached early manhood before he also passed away. Auguste de Staël had preceded him along the road to eternity, and the Duchess de Broglie did not live to be old.

Twenty years had hardly elapsed before, with the sole exception of her faithful friend and cousin; Madame Necker de Saussure, no near relative of Madame de Staël was still alive ; but those who had known her did not need to be reminded of her. She was constantly present to them, a radiant, imperishable vision. "I wish I could see you asleep," Bonstetten had said one day to her. "I would like to feel sure that you sometimes close your eyes, and are not always thinking." She had remained so bright and full of life to the last, that even Death's inexorable hand could not for many long years efface the recollection of her vivid personality.

In a page of the *Mémoires d'Outre Tombe*, Châteaubriand has left a description of a visit paid by himself and Madame Récamier to the grave at Coppet. It was fifteen years after Madame de Staël's death. The Château was closed, the apartments deserted. Juliette, wandering through them, recognised one after another

the spots where Madame de Staël had played the piano, had talked to those gathered round her, or had written.

The two friends went into the park where the autumn leaves already were reddening and falling. The wind subsided by degrees, and the sound of a mill-stream alone broke the stillness. Madame Récamier entered the wood in whose depths the grave is hidden, while Châteaubriand remained looking at the snowy line of the Alps, and at the glittering lake. Above the sombre heights of Jura the sky was covered with golden clouds "like a glory spreading above a bier." Suddenly Madame Récamier, pale and tearful, phantom-like among phantoms, emerged from the wood. And on her companion's melancholy spirit fell a sense of all the emptiness of glory, of all the sad reality of life. "*Qu'est-ce que la gloire?*" asked Madame de Staël. "*Ce n'est qu'un deuil éclatant du bonheur.*" We could wish that the most famous of women might have held a less hopeless creed.

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## **MADAME DE STAËL.**

### **CHAPTER XV.**

#### **HER WORKS.**

ANY notice of Madame de Staël would be imperfect without a review of her works. She did not begin, like so many famous authors, to write at an abnormally early age—it is true, she composed *Portraits*, which were read aloud in her mother's salon, but everybody did as much in those days, and her attempts were not sufficiently remarkable to stamp her at once as a literary genius. It has been said how much her father discouraged her writing. This may account in part for the tardy development of the taste, although more was doubtless due to the peerless conversations in which, before the Revolution, her young intellect found all that it could need of idées. However this may be, she was twenty before she wrote *Sophie, ou les Sentimens Secrets*, that elegiac "comedy" which drew down on its authoress's youthful head the animadversions of her austere mother. Madame Necker was shocked at the subject, which represented a young girl of seventeen struggling against a secret passion for her guardian, a married

man, who is in love with her. Sophie (who, by 'the bye, is English) behaves in the noblest manner as soon as she discovers that her feelings are reciprocated, and leaves the home of which she has unwittingly destroyed the peace. Her guardian and his wife are no less equal to the occasion, and Milord Henri Bedford, Sophie's slighted swain, is inspired by their example. Everybody expresses his or her sentiments in polished and prolix verse, and the curtain finally falls on four loftily eloquent and magnanimously miserable people. The style is not inflated, but the piece is very dull, and, while betraying little of the writer's future talent, reveals two of her defects, exaggeration of sentiment and a want of humour.

To the same date as *Sophie* belong *Jane Grey*, a tragedy in five acts, also in verse, of no real merit; another tragedy, *Montmorency*, and three tales—all romantic and tiresome.

Finally, in 1788, when she was nearly twenty-two, Madame de Staël published her *Letters on Rousseau*, and thus established her position as an aspirant to literary fame. The book, coming from a woman, made a great sensation. Indeed, this fact of her sex must never be lost sight of in judging the reception accorded to Madame de Staël's works. She attempted subjects of historical and philosophical interest which no woman in her country or age had approached before her.

As might be expected, she was an ardent admirer of Rousseau. Her sympathy with the philosophy of Helvetius was naturally slight. She required something declamatory, earnest, and didactic. In a glorification of natural sentiments to result in some future apotheosis of humanity lay the key to her creed.

"Virtue" and still "virtue," and more "virtue" was her cry, as though "virtue" were a tangible and definitely constituted thing to be extracted *en bloc* out of the materials composing humanity. To such a mind it was inevitable that *Emile* and the *Contrat Social* should appeal more strongly than any number of witty epigrams at the expense of penitents and priests.

She sympathised with the philosophy of the eighteenth century in so far as it tended, by uprooting abuses, to promote the progress of culture and the emancipation of the oppressed, but she required some system that would reconstruct as well as destroy; and, being a fervid believer in theories, disliked nothing so much as the idea of leaving the human race to take care of itself. Rousseau, as embodying a protest against the spirit of frivolous negation, appeared to her in the light of a prophet of perfection; and she saw in the approaching meeting of the States General a first step towards the realisation of his views. These radiant ideals were destined to be suddenly and painfully obscured by the events of the Terror. Her only contribution to literature during that time was her celebrated and impassioned defence of the unhappy Queen. Public events so fascinated her attention that she had no leisure for any other thought. Two sentences in her *Réflexions sur la Paix*, published in 1794, reveal this preoccupation.

"During the reign of Robespierre," she says, "when each day brought a list of devoted victims, I could only desire death, and long for the end of the world and of the human race which was witness to, or accomplice in, such horrors. I should have made a reproach to myself even of thought, because it was

separate from sorrow." In another passage she exclaims: "Oh appalling time, of which centuries will barely dim the trace; time which will never belong to the past!"

Nevertheless, Robespierre had hardly fallen before her ever vivid faith in humanity revived in full force. She looked for safety to the faction which divided extreme revolutionaries from extreme reactionaries, and refused to believe that it could only act as a buffer. Its moderation was partly caused by exhaustion; yet Madame de Staël, always optimistic, maintained that having no passions it must have convictions, and that the trumpet-call of liberty would summon it to the front. In this she was mistaken; but in the course of her observations on public events she uttered one remarkable prophecy. "France," she wrote, "may remain a republic; but to become a monarchy it must first submit to a military government."

In 1790 she published her work on *The Influence of the Passions upon Human Happiness*. This was originally to have been divided into two parts. The first portion was to be devoted to reflections on man's peculiar destiny; the second, to the constitutional fate of nations. We have to concern ourselves with the first alone, as the second, which would have required an immense and minute knowledge of ancient and modern governments, was never even begun.

In Madame de Staël's view the true obstacle to individual and political happiness lay in the force of passion. Neutralize this, and the problem of government would be solved. Happiness, as she conceived it, was to consist in having hope without fear, activity without anxiety, glory without calumny, love without inconstancy—in a word, ideal good with no

admixture of evil. The happiness of nations would consist in the combination of republican liberty with monarchical calm, of emulation among talents unaccompanied by factious clamour, of military spirit in foreign affairs, and a law-abiding tendency in domestic matters. She concluded by saying that such an ideal is impossible of attainment, and the only achievable happiness is to be acquired by studying the true means of avoiding moral pain. To the discovery of this spiritual Nirvana her work was directed. The subject, as is evident, was a sterile one, since it dealt with abstractions that have no corresponding realities. To say that men and nations would be prosperous and contented without some particular institution or defect, is the same as to say that a human face would be beautiful without features. A blank surface is conceivable as a blank surface, but not as a physiognomy; and to speculate concerning ideal humanity divorced from social systems imposes on thought the most futile exercise that ever occurred to an enlightened mind. Such being the case, it is not surprising that Madame de Staël should eventually have abandoned her self-imposed task. Even as much of it as she accomplished landed her on a moving morass of conclusions of which the essential nullity must have been evident to herself before anybody. For the rest, her analysis of the various passions is admirable. One wonders as one reads how a young woman could have reached so perfect a comprehension of the springs of human action. The penetration displayed is unerring, and only equalled by the masculinize vigour of touch. A good example is the following: "Truly great men are such as have rendered a greatness like their own less necessary to successive generations." And here is

another striking passage: "A revolution suspends every action but that of force. Social order establishes the ascendancy of esteem and virtue, but a revolution limits men's choice to their physical capacities. The only sort of moral influence that it does not exclude is the fanaticism of such ideas as, not being susceptible of any restraint, are weapons of war and not exercises of the mind. To aspire to distinction in times of revolution one must always outstrip the actual momentum of events, and the consequence of this is a rapid descent which one has no power of staying. In vain one perceives the abyss in front. To throw oneself from the chariot is to be killed by the fall, so that to avoid the danger is more perilous than to face it. One must of one's own accord tread the path that leads to ruin, since the least step backwards overturns the individual but does not hinder the event."

This is a very good example both of the clearness of Madame de Staël's thought and the careless confusion of her style. She introduced metaphors just as they occurred to her, without any preparatory gradations of thought.

The second section of the work is devoted to the examination of natural affections such as family love, friendship, and pity. Here, again, the analysis is delicate and true, but the mind, fatigued by the futility of the theme, recoils from such minute dissection of emotion. Passion, being comparatively rare, is always interesting, but sentiment does not bear prolonged contemplation.

Finally come the remedies to be applied to the evils worked by passion. They consist in philosophy, in study, and the practice of benevolence, joined, if pos-

sible, to a child-like faculty of extracting from each hour just the amount of happiness that it contains. With this lame and impotent conclusion the book practically ends, for all the remaining reflections do not avail to place in any clearer light the uncertain and colourless thought of the writer.

Her next work was that on *Literature Considered in Relation to Social Institutions*. Its object was to establish the continuous progress and ultimate perfectibility of the human mind, and the happy influence exercised by liberty upon literature.

The theory of the authoress was that the progress of philosophy, *i.e.* thought, had been gradual, while that of poetry had been spasmodic.

Art, indeed, offering, by its early maturity, an awkward contradiction to her system, she proceeded to get rid of it by describing it as the product of imagination rather than of thought, and by adding that its plastic and sensuous qualities rendered it capable of flourishing under systems of government which necessarily crush every other form of intellectual activity. To prove the perfectibility of the human mind, she then had but poetry and philosophy. To the latter she assigned the really glorious future, while the former she regarded as finished. She was the first of the Romanticists, in the sense that she preferred the poetry of the north to that of the south; and her predilections in this line carried her so far, that she placed Ossian above Homer. She considered that the early forms of poetry—in other words, mere transcripts of material impressions—were superior to those later creations in which sentiment enters as an element. And this idea, which seems at first a contradiction to her theory of perfectibility, was really intended to

confirm it. For, in her view, the value of literature, consisting exclusively in the amount of thought that it contained, introspective poetry became a mere bridge which the mind traversed on its way to wider horizons.

Madame de Staël was not only not a poet herself, but she was incapable of appreciating the higher forms of poetry. In her excursions through the regions of literature, she was always in pursuit of some theory which would reconcile the contradictions of human destiny. Man, regarded as socially perfectible, being her ideal, she was in haste to classify and relegate to some convenient limbo the portions of a subject which did not directly contribute to her hypotheses. Having disposed, therefore, of poetry and art, she undertook to consider literature from the point of view of psychology. She was only pleased with it when self-conscious and analytical. Dante probably perplexed her, and she evoked to condemn him the perruqued shade of "Le Goût." Shakespeare she applauded, as might be expected, chiefly in consideration of *Hamlet*; while Petrarch pleased her principally because he was harmonious; and Ariosto because he was fanciful. The true significance of the Renaissance escaped her. She sought for the origin of each literature in the political and religious institutions of the country where it arose, instead of regarding both literature and social conditions as simultaneous products of the national mind. Her erudition was inadequate to her task, and the purpose of her work, by warping her judgments, contributed to make them superficial. While pronouncing the English and French drama to be essentially superior to the Greek, she characteristically preferred Euripides to his two mighty predecessors. The gran-

deur of the dominant idea of Greek tragedy—that of an inevitable destiny, against which man struggles in vain—appears to have escaped her altogether. This is not surprising, since such a conception was entirely opposed to her own order of mind and to the age in which she lived. The root of all the social theories then prevailing was the value of the individual. Man was not a puppet of the gods, but the architect of his own fate. To lose hold of ideal virtue was to become incapable of governing or being governed; and ideal virtue was a definite entity which anybody might possess who chose. This—rather crudely stated—was Madame de Staël's point of view. Her enthusiasm rejected all idea of limited responsibilities. The ethical value of the Æschylean trilogy—the awful sense of overhanging doom which pervades it—did not appeal to her, because it tended to the annihilation of the struggling soul. In other words, she liked *self-conscious* drama, and was attracted to Euripides by his creation of artificial situations, in which interesting personages had room and leisure to explain themselves.

With Aristophanes she was frankly disgusted; from her didactic standpoint, because of his pronounced indecency; and on artistic grounds, because he attacked living individuals instead of creating characters, like Tartufe and Falstaff. To his beauties she remained entirely blind, and this, perhaps, is to be explained by her deficiency in the æsthetic faculty. It is said that Châteaubriand first taught her to appreciate nature, and Schlegel to perceive the loveliness of art. Chênedollé complained that she had lived for years opposite Lake Leman “without finding an image” in regard to it; and she herself once frankly admitted that of

her own accord she would hardly open her window to gaze on the bay of Naples, while she would go a hundred miles to converse with a new mind.

Its defects admitted, we may own that Madame de Staël's work contains many charming chapters. If, true to her theory, she provokes her reader by preferring the Latin poets to the Greek ones, and Quintilian to Cicero, simply because of their later date; if she persists, rather than modify her views, that the sterile scholasticism of the Middle Ages was not a real retrogression, and strangely overlooks, in her admiration for Christianity, the intellectual benefits which man owes to the Arabs; on the other hand, she has flashes of admirable insight. The chapter on the invasion of Italy by the barbarians, and the part played by Christianity in fusing the two races, is very suggestive. But, unfortunately, it is suggestive *only*, and sins by a sketchiness which, more or less, mars the whole book. This was one of Madame de Staël's defects. She abounded in ideas, but failed either in the power or the patience to work them out.

Two other interesting chapters are those on the "Grace, Gaiety, and Taste of the French Nation," and on "Literature in the Reign of Louis XIV." The peculiar social influences which, among successive generations of ~~courtiers~~, produced the best writers of France, are very happily described; but here again the conclusions are indicated rather than developed. Madame de Staël stated her conviction that the palmy days of French wit were over, and that the literature of the future, if it wished to flourish, must invest itself with greater gravity.

Convinced that the moment had come for the dramatist to pack up his puppet-show and despatch it to a

museum of antiquities, she laid down rules for an ideal republican literature, and prescribed strong emotions, careful analysis of character, and a high moral tone as indispensable ingredients. She was in fact one of the first to admire and write that appalling product, the novel with a purpose.

Anything duller than *Delphine* it would be difficult to imagine. From the first page to the last there is hardly one line of genuine inspiration. All is forced, exaggerated, overstrained. The misfortunes of the heroine are so needlessly multiplied, that they end by exasperating the reader; and the *motif* of the book—the contrast between conventional and moral ideals—fails in true dramatic interest. The plot is as follows: Madame de Vernon has a daughter, Mathilde, beautiful and sanctimonious, whom she desires to marry to Léonce de Mondoville, a young Spaniard of noble birth and aristocratic prejudices. Madame de Vernon has in the whole world one friend, Delphine d'Albémard, a miracle of grace, wit, and beauty, who does acts of unheard of generosity, and generally by some evil chance accomplishes them at the moment when they lead to unlucky results for herself. She is a young widow, and has been left by her elderly and devoted husband a fortune, of which she proceeds to divest herself as rapidly as possible. One of her favorite objects of charity is Madame de Vernon, who does not deserve her pity, since the pecuniary embarrassments under which she suffers arise from her love of card-playing and general mismanagement. But Delphine adores her friend, who is represented as extremely charming, and is in some respects a well-drawn character. Her life is one long act of dissimulation. She masks her cynicism cleverly, under an appearance of indolence,

which dispenses her from ever taking inconvenient resolutions, or appearing agitated by events which should—but do not—move her. She has some faint affection for her generous dupe—Delphine; but not enough to be prevented from taking every mean advantage of her. There is some difficulty in arranging Mathilde's marriage, on account of the want of a dowry. Delphine hastens to supply this, and then the bridegroom elect, Léonce, appears on the scene. He is described as divinely handsome. The cold and pietistic Mathilde falls in love with him immediately (as was her duty, since he was to be her husband), but so, unfortunately, does Delphine. What is still worse, he is by no means attracted by his *fiancée*, but reciprocates the young widow's passion. Then the drama begins. Madame de Vernon, while seeming to see nothing, sees everything. Mathilde is really blind. Delphine is agitated, but resolved; if possible, to be happy. This, by the way, is the only gleam of common sense that she has throughout the book. Unfortunately, she manages to compromise herself (of course quite innocently) by espousing the cause of a pair of guilty but repentant lovers; and Madame de Vernon cleverly uses the awkward positions in which she places herself, in order to detach Léonce from her. He marries Mathilde and is madly unhappy. Delphine pours out her feelings in long letters to her sister-in-law and confidant, Mademoiselle d'Albémart, letters which she writes, by the way, on recovering from fainting-fits, or when lying in bed, or when on the verge of distraction. The whole of the novel is told in letters, and is proportionately long-winded and unnatural.

Not long after the marriage Madame de Vernon dies, and on her death-bed confesses her perfidy to her

victim. Then the mutual passion of Delphine and Léonce enters upon a new and harrowing phase. They determine to remain technically virtuous, but to see one another constantly—of course unknown to Mathilde. This unnatural situation—unnaturally prolonged, becomes unbearable through its monotonous misery.

Finally Mathilde discovers the state of the case and conjures Delphine to separate herself from Léonce. Madame d'Albémard consents, and disappears. Léonce is then described by his confidant as being on the point of madness. He alternately loses consciousness, and rushes about with dishevelled hair and distraught looks. Delphine goes to Switzerland, and there proceeds to compromise herself anew, this time beyond recall, for the sake of a rejected lover who had behaved disgracefully to her.

She had taken refuge in a convent of which the superioress, Madame de Ternan, turns out to be the aunt of Léonce. This lady is something of the same sort as Madame de Vernon—except that her egotism, although quite as systematic, is not so base. But it can become so on occasion, and, as she is rather fond of Delphine and anxious to keep her with her to solace her old age, she plays into the hands of Madame de Mondoville (the mother of Léonce) and cleverly contrives to make Delphine take the veil. Barely has this been done when Léonce appears and claims her as his own, Mathilde having in the meanwhile died. Then is the exhausted reader harassed anew by a fresh spectacle of poignant anguish. A Monsieur de Sébersci suggests that Delphine should break her vows, quit her convent, and join Léonce, pointing out that, thanks to the Revolution, they can be quite respectably

married in France. Delphine is horrified at first, but Léonce, having announced the firm intention of putting an end to his existence if she remains a nun, she finally escapes and joins him. One begins to hope that they are going to be happy at last, when the "purpose" of the book presents itself. Madame de Staël was anxious to prove that social conventions may not be braved with impunity, but overtake and crush the nature which defies them. Delphine throughout had listened to no voice but that of her conscience and her heart: she is consequently the victim of calumny. Léonce is principally swayed by passion. He defies society in the end to possess Delphine, but has no sooner induced her to break her vows for him than he begins to feel the stigma of the act. He leaves her, and seeks death on the battle-field. Death spares him, but he is arrested as an aristocrat and condemned to be shot. Delphine follows him, and by her eloquence wrings a pardon from the judge. Léonce, enlightened by the approach of death as to the nothingness of the world's opinion, is prepared to live happily at last with the woman whom he still professes to adore. But all at once the order for his release is rescinded and he is taken out to die. Delphine accompanies him, and talks all along the road. Indeed, she is superfluously eloquent, from the first page of her history to the last. When Léonce has been strung up by her to the highest pitch of exalted feeling, she takes poison and dies at his feet. He is then shot; and the lovers are interred in one grave by Monsieur de Serbellane, who has appeared again in the last chapter, after having been the primary though unwitting cause of his unhappy friends' woes.

It is difficult to understand why critics like Sainte Beuve should so warmly have praised this novel. No doubt it shows talent, especially in the analysis of mental struggle; but it is false from beginning to end. All the characters want vitality, although some of the qualities attributed to them are described with penetration and force. Delphine and Léonce talk too much, and faint too much, and are simply insupportable. Finally, the book is drearily monotonous and unrelieved by one gleam of poetry or humour.

*Corinne* is a classic of which everybody is bound to speak with respect. The enormous admiration which it excited at the time of its appearance may seem somewhat strange in this year of grace; but then it must be remembered that Italy was not the over-written country it has since become. Besides this, Madame de Staël was the most celebrated woman, and, after Napoleon, the most conspicuous personage of her day. Except Châteaubriand, she had nobody to dispute with her the palm of literary glory in France. Her exile, her literary circle, her courageous opinions, had kept the eyes of Europe fixed on her for years, so that any work from her pen was sure to excite the liveliest curiosity.

*Corinne* is a kind of glorified guide-book, with some of the qualities of a good novel. It is very long-winded, but the appetite of the age was robust in that respect, and the highly-strung emotions of the hero and heroine could not shock a taste which had been formed by the *Sorrows of Werther*. It is extremely moral, deeply sentimental, and of a deadly earnestness—three characteristics which could not fail to recommend it to a dreary and ponderous genera-

tion, the most deficient in taste that ever trod the earth.

But it is artistic in the sense that the interest is concentrated from first to last on the central figure, and the drama, such as it is, unfolds itself naturally from its starting-point, which is the contrast between the characters of Oswald and Corinne.

Oswald Lord Nelvil is a young man of exquisite sensibility and profound melancholy. He comes to Rome (after distinguishing himself heroically during a fire at Ancona) accompanied by a young Frenchman, the Count D'Erfeuil, whom he has casually met. One of the first sights which greets them on their arrival in the Eternal City is the triumphal procession of "Corinne" on her way to be crowned in the Capitol. She is a musician, an improvisatrice, a Muse or Sibyl, with all the poetry and passion of Italy stamped upon her radiant brow. In the midst of her improvisation she exchanges glances with Lord Nelvil, and the fate of both is sealed. • He is intended to be a typical Englishman imbued with a horror of eccentricity in women. His ideal of the sex is a domestic angel, and he feels bound to disapprove of Corinne, who lives alone, though young and beautiful, and offers the spectacle of her various talents to the profane view of the crowd. The Count D'Erfeuil mocks at everything, and is the most amusing character in the book ; feels no scruples about knowing Corinne, and, having quickly discovered that his reserved English friend pleases her, he persuades that gentleman to call on her also. Corinne speaks English wonderfully, and allows Lord Nelvil to divine that there is a mystery about her past. Once she betrays great agitation on hearing the name of Edgermond, which is the patronymic of a certain

Lucile, whom Lord Nelvil's father had destined him to marry. Grief at the death of this father is, by the way, the ostensible cause of his persistent melancholy, but he also vaguely hints at remorse. He promises that he will one day confide his history to Corinne, who on her side prepares herself to tell him hers. But as she greatly fears the effect of it on him, and is deeply in love, she puts off the evil hour, and, in order to keep him with her, offers to be his cicerone in Rome. Together they wander among the ruins, visit the galleries, and drive on the Appian Way. Corinne explains everything, discourses on everything, and Oswald interrupts her with exclamations of rapture at her wit and learning. This novel form of courtship lasts for some weeks, and finally the lovers proceed to Naples. Corinne persuades Oswald that there is nothing at all extraordinary in such conduct in Italy, where everyone, according to her, may do as he likes. But the Count D'Erfeuil makes remarks which, although intended to be merely flippant, are sensible enough to convince Lord Nelvil that he must either marry Corinne or leave her. He is very much in love, or fancies himself so. Nevertheless he hesitates because of the mystery surrounding his *inamorata*. Who is she? What is her name? Whence comes her fortune? If she is not quite blameless, he thinks he can never marry her, for that would be derogating from the traditions of his order and outraging the shade of his father. The mental struggle which he undergoes is visible to Corinne and fills her with anguish and alarm. At last, during an expedition to Vesuvius, Oswald speaks. He had been at one time in love with an unworthy French woman; had lingered in France when his father required his presence in

England, and had finally returned, only to find him dead. From that hour he had known no peace : remorse had pursued him ; his filial love, which was morbidly excessive, caused him to look upon himself as almost a parricide, and he considered that he was thenceforward morally bound to do nothing which his father might disapprove. This absurd conclusion afflicts Corinne visibly, and the sight of her agitation reawakens all Oswald's doubts. He conjures her to tell him her history. She consents ; but begs for a few days' grace, and employs the interval in planning and carrying out a fête on Cape Misenum. In front of the azure, tideless sea she takes her lyre and pours out an improvisation on the past glories of that classic shore. This, although Oswald does not know it, is an adieu to her past life, for she foresees that what she has to tell him of herself will entirely change her destiny. Either he will refuse to marry her, and then she will never know happiness again, but wingless, voiceless, will go down to her tomb, or else he will make her his wife, and the Sibyl will be lost in the peeress.

The next day she leaves with him the narrative of her youth. She is the daughter of Lord Edgermond by an Italian wife, consequently the half-sister of Lucile. At the age of fifteen she had gone to England, and fallen under the rule of her step-mother, Lady Edgermond, a cold and rigid Englishwoman, who cared for nothing outside her small provincial town, and regarded genius as a dangerous eccentricity. In the narrow monotony of the life imposed upon her Corinne nearly died. At the age of twenty-one she finally escaped and returned to Italy, having dropped her family name out of respect for Lady Edgermond's

feelings. Until her meeting with Oswald she had led the life of a muse, singing, dancing, playing, improvising for the whole of Roman society to admire, and had conceived no idea of greater felicity until learning to love. This love had been a source of peculiar torment to her from the fact of her divining how much the unconventionality of her conduct, when fully known to him, must shock Oswald's English notions of propriety. In the first moment, however, his love triumphs over these considerations, and he resolves to marry Corinne. Only he wishes first—in order that no reproach may attach to her—to force Lady Edgermond once again to acknowledge her as her husband's daughter. He goes to England, partly for this purpose, partly because his regiment has been ordered on active service.

In England he again meets Lucile, a cold-mannered, correct, pure-minded, but secretly ardent English girl, with an odd resemblance in many ways to a French *jeune fille*. He mentions the subject of her step-daughter to the upright but selfish Lady Edgermond, who has set her heart on seeing Oswald the husband of Lucile. She is too honourable to try and detach him from Corinne by any underhand means, but does what she knows will be far more effectual; that is, she makes him acquainted with the fact that his father had seen Corinne in her early girlhood, had admired her, but had strongly pronounced against the marriage proposed by Lord Edgermond between her and Oswald. In the view of the late Lord Nelvil, she was too brilliant and distinguished for domestic life. This is a terrible blow to Oswald. He begins to think he must give up Corinne, and is strengthened in the idea by perceiving that the

beautiful and virtuous Lucile is in love with him. Finally he marries her, decided at the last by Corinne's inexplicable silence. She has not answered his letters for a month, and he concludes that she has forgotten him. But her silence is owing to her having left Venice and come to England. She loses a whole month in London, for very insufficient reasons—necessary, however, to the story—and at last follows Oswald to Scotland just in time to learn that he is married, to fall senseless on the road-side, and to be picked up by the Count d'Erfueil. She returns heart-broken to Italy, and dies slowly through four long years of unbroken misery.

When she is near her end Oswald comes to Florence, accompanied by his wife and child. He had begun to regret Corinne as soon as he had married Lucile, who, on her side, being naturally resentful, takes refuge in coldness and reserve. As soon as Lord Nelvil learns that his old love is in Florence and dying he wishes ardently to see her, but she refuses to receive him. He sends the child to her, and she teaches it some of her accomplishments. Lucile visits her secretly, and is converted by her eloquence to the necessity of rendering herself more attractive to her husband by displaying some graces of mind.

At last Corinne consents to see Oswald once again, but it shall be, she determines, in public. This is one of the most unnatural scenes in the book. Corinne invites all her friends to assemble in a lecture hall. Thither she has herself transported and placed in an arm-chair. A young girl clad in white and crowned with flowers recites the Song of the Swan, or adieu to life, which Corinne has composed, while Oswald,

listening to it and gazing on the dying poetess from his place in the crowd, is suffocated with emotion and finally faints. A few days later Corinne dies, her last act being to point with her diaphanous hand to the moon, which is partially obscured by a band of cloud such as she and Lord Nelvil had once seen when in Naples.

Even as a picture of Italy, *Corinne* leaves much to be desired. Madame de Staël's ideas of art were acquired. She had no spontaneous admiration even for the things she most warmly praised, and her judgments were conventional and essentially cold. Some of the descriptions are good in the sense of being accurate and forcibly expressed. But even in the best of them—that of Vesuvius—one feels the effort. Madame de Staël is wide-eyed and conscientious, but has no flashes of inspired vision. She can catalogue but not paint. A certain difficulty in saying enough on æsthetic subjects is rendered evident by her vice of moralising. Instead of admiring a marble column as a column, or a picture as a picture, she finds in it food for reflection on the nature of man and the destiny of the world. Some of her remarks on Italian character are extremely clever, and show her usual surprising power of observation; but they are generally superficial.

This was due, in part, to her system of explaining everything by race and political institutions, in part to her passion for generalization. Because Italians had produced the finest art and some of the finest music; because they had no salons and wrote sonnets; because they had developed a curiously systematic form of conjugal infidelity; finally, because they had no political liberty, Madame de Staël constructed a theory

which represented them as simply passionate, romantic, imaginative and indulgent. This theory has cropped up now and again in literature from her days to our own; and if partially correct, overlooks the subtler shades and complex contradictions of the Italian mind.

Roman society in the beginning of this century was far from being the transfigured and exotic thing represented in *Corinne*. The modern Sibyl's prototype, poor Maddalena Maria Morelli, was mercilessly pasquinaded, and on her road to the Capitol pelted with rotten eggs. This gives a very good idea of the sort of impression that would have been produced on a *real* Prince of Castel-Forte and his fellows by the presence in their midst of a young and beautiful woman, unmarried, nameless, and rich. *Corinne's* lavish exhibition of her accomplishments is another "false note," as singing and dancing were but rarely, if ever, performed by amateurs in Italy. What redeems the book are the detached sentences of thought that gem almost every page of it. Madame de Staël had gradually shaken off the vices of style which her warmest admirers deplore in her, and in her *Allemagne* she was presently to reveal herself as singularly lucid, brilliant, and acute. This work of hers on Germany is, perhaps, the most satisfactory of her many productions. As a review of society, art, literature, and philosophy, it naturally lends itself to the form best suited to her essentially analytical mind.

Madame de Staël was always obliged to generalize, that being a law of her intelligence, and this disposition is accentuated in the *Allemagne*, through her desire to establish such contrasts between Germany and France, as would inspire the latter with a sense of

its defects. She saw Germany on the eve of a great awakening, and was not perhaps as fully conscious of this as she might have been. As Sainte Beuve happily says, she was not a poet, and it is only poets who, like birds of passage, feel a coming change of season. Germany appealed to her, however, through everything in herself that was least French; her earnestness, her vague but ardent religious tendencies, her spiritualism, her excessive admiration of intellectual pursuits. She was, therefore, exceptionally well-qualified to reveal to her own countrymen the hitherto unknown or unappreciated beauties of the German mind.

She was, on the other hand, extremely alive to the dulness of German, and especially of Viennese, society, and portrays it in a series of delightfully witty phrases. The *Allemagne* is indeed the wittiest of all her works, and abounds in the happiest touches.

The opinions expressed on German literature are favourable towards it, and on the whole correct. If she betrays that Schiller was personally more sympathetic to her than Goethe, she nevertheless was quick to perceive in the latter the strain of southern passion, the light, warmth, and colour, which made his intellect less national than universal.

Her chapters on Kant and German philosophy generally, are luminous if not exhaustive. She takes the moral sentiment as her standpoint, and pronounces from that on the different systems. Needless to say, she admires metaphysical speculations, and considers them as valuable in developing intellect and strengthening character.

*Les Dix Années d'Exil* is a charming book. Apart from its interest as a transcript of the writer's im-

pressions during her exile at Coppet and subsequent flight across Europe, it contains brilliant pictures of different lands, and especially of Russia. One is really amazed to note how much she grasped of the national characteristics during her brief sojourn in that country. The worst reproach that can be addressed to her description is that, as usual, it is rather too favourable. Her anxiety to prove that no country could flourish, during a reign such as Napoleon's, made her disposed to see through rose-coloured spectacles the Governments which found force to resist him.

The *Considerations on the French Revolution* were published posthumously. According to Sainte Beuve, this is the finest of Madame de Staël's works. "Her star," he says, "rose in its full splendour only above her tomb." It is difficult to pronounce any summary judgment on this book, which is partly biographical and partly historical. The first volume is principally devoted to a vindication of Necker; the second to an attack on Napoleon; the third to a study of the English Constitution and the applicability of its principles to France. The two first volumes alone were revised by the authoress before her death. We find in this work all Madame de Staël's natural and surprising power of comprehension. She handles difficult political problems with an ease that would be more astonishing still, had the book more unity. As it is, each separate circumstance is related and explained admirably, but one is not made to reach the core of the stupendous event of which Europe still feels the vibration. Her portrait of Napoleon is unsurpassable for force and irony, for sarcasm and truth. All she possessed of epigrammatic power seems to have

come unsought to, enable her to avenge herself on the mean, great man who had feared her enough to exile and persecute her.

In closing this rapid review of her works, one asks why was Madame de Staël not a greater writer? The answer is easy; she lacked high creative power and the sense of form. Her mind was strong of grasp and wide in range, but continuous effort fatigued it. She could strike out isolated sentences alternately brilliant, exhaustive, and profound, but she could not link them to other sentences so as to form an organic page. Her thought was definite singly, but vague as a whole. She always saw things separately, and tried to unite them arbitrarily, and it is generally difficult to follow out any idea of hers from its origin to its end. Her thoughts are like pearls of price profusely scattered, or carelessly strung together, but not set in any design. On closing one of her books, the reader is left with no continuous impression. He has been dazzled and delighted, enlightened also by flashes; but the horizons disclosed have vanished again, and the outlook is enriched by no new vistas.

Then she was deficient in the higher qualities of imagination. She could analyse but not characterise; construct but not create. She could take one defect like selfishness, or one passion like love, and display its workings; or she could describe a whole character, like Napoleon's, with marvellous penetration; but she could not make her personages talk or act like human beings. She lacked pathos, and had no sense of humour. In short, hers was a mind endowed with enormous powers of comprehension, and an amazing richness of ideas, but deficient in perception of beauty, in poetry, and true originality. She was a great social

page, but her influence on literature was not destined to be lasting; because, in spite of foreseeing much, she had not the true prophetic sense of proportion, and confused the things of the present with those of the future—the accidental with the enduring.

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